

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

Universities and Research Institutes

Name of Institution	University of Oxford
Reporting period	April 2024 – March 2025 Year 3 of current 3-year action plan
Date approved by governing body	6 March 2025
Date published online	April 2025
Web address of annual report	Charter & Concordat Commitments for the Career Development of Researchers University of Oxford
Web address of institutional Researcher Development Concordat webpage	Charter & Concordat Commitments for the Career Development of Researchers University of Oxford
Contact for questions/concerns on researcher career development	Rachel Bray, Head of the Researcher Hub Rachel.Bray@admin.ox.ac.uk
Date statement sent to Researcher Development Concordat secretariat via	April 2025 CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk

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 2018–2024 articulates the University's vision for embedding a research culture that upholds an inclusive, supportive 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 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). For the first time this year, Academic Advocates /Champions for Research Staff have been appointed at departmental/faculty level within each of the four main academic divisions (bringing the total to over 55). 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 2022–2025 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 central units: the Researcher Hub and the Research Strategy and Policy Unit.

Launched in April 2021, the [Researcher Hub](#) partners 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 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 unite 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. Weblinks have been included in the report where relevant. Please note that some are links to internal resources and cannot be accessed by readers who are external to the University.

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

Institution

- **Embedding Concordat activity** (1.3, 1.4, 2.2, 3.3): Motivated by the scale and diversity of Oxford's research environments, a collaborative University-wide project now provides departments with structured support in strengthening their local research culture. The '[Research Culture Toolkit](#)' surfaces good practice for sharing via the [Inspiration Bank](#), identifies gaps needing support and signposts to resources, including central Concordat-related policy, systems and provision. Following a successful pilot phase in eight departments, University-wide implementation is underway, and the first of three biennial phases will be completed in March 2025.

- **Supporting excellent research practice (2.3):** A governance review of research practice activity resulted in the creation of a new [Research Practice Sub-Committee](#) that provides oversight of the policy, training, and digital support needs on a range of research practice activities, from authorship and publication to reproducibility and research data management. The University's [Open Research Position Statement](#) was published in June 2024. Symplectic Elements, the University's research information system, enables authors to record their contribution to a research output using the CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy). Since its launch in October 2022 and until July 2024, over 4,000 contribution roles have been recorded, with 539 outputs with at least two contribution roles recorded, and 752 with at least one contribution role recorded.

Academic Managers of Researchers

- **Formalising academic advocacy roles (1.2):** The recruitment of departmental Advocates/Champions for Research Staff in all divisions has improved communication and collaboration between researcher representatives and their academic counterparts. All divisions have held joint meetings of representatives and advocates, enabling mutual support towards achieving local priorities for research staff.

Researchers

- **Welcome inductions (1.1):** All new researchers are invited by the Researcher Hub to a [welcoming induction](#) orientating them to their responsibilities, forms of support they can expect from the University and where they can find these. 35% of those invited between April 2024 and March 2025 attended one of the five sessions. The Academic divisions also support researcher inductions: through the popular 'Optimise your time at Oxford' events, Mathematical, Physical, and Life Sciences Division (MPLS) researchers meet peers and professional teams able to support their career development. To complement inductions offered by departments, plans to re-launch in-person divisional inductions are under consideration in the Medical Sciences Division (MSD) and in the Humanities Division. The Social Sciences Division (SSD), Research Staff Forum has encouraged departments to provide quality inductions by producing a template and checklist.
- **Supporting pro-active career development (1.4):** Informed by the success of the mid-contract check-in event used by the University of Cambridge, the Researcher Hub piloted a similar online event for researchers. [Your Next Career Step](#) offers researchers structured reflective questions on career options, then opportunity to set goals and discuss preparedness for their next career steps, whether within Oxford, academia, or beyond. The pilot attracted 208 bookings within days of launch, and the additional session in January 2025

	<p>catered to the waiting list and improved the model based on participant feedback.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding timely support (1.1): Consistently promoted and updated, the Researcher's Trailmap is Oxford's institution-wide signpost, pointing researchers to well-being, research, and careers guidance, in a timely fashion. The Trailmap headlined MSD's May 2024 newsletter, resulting in ~300 'click throughs' and a demonstrable impact on total page views. All divisions and central service teams actively contribute to updates and promotion, as do researcher representatives. • Equitable treatment (1.5): The new Report and Support Tool can be used to report an incident or to seek support. It is available to all staff: it is embedded in the Harassment Advisory Service, and supported by the University Harassment Policy. All staff were informed of the tool in MT 2024. Reports can be made anonymously or staff can ask to speak to an advisor for impartial guidance and support. Between January and September 2024, a total of 59 reports (across all staff categories) were made, of which 66% were anonymous. For named reports, a Harassment Advisor will provide confidential, impartial guidance to the staff member experiencing harassment and those dealing with a complaint against them.
Employment	<p>Institution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VC Pay & Conditions Report (1.6): The Vice-Chancellor, Irene Tracey, commissioned a review of all aspects of pay and conditions for all University Staff in her admission speech in January 2023. Findings of the Pay & Conditions review were submitted to Council in February 2024 and a programme of immediate action approved. Some key highlights for researchers include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The commitment to address the use of repeat fixed-term contracts via an annual review of contract type for staff on such contracts for over four consecutive years; ○ The introduction of a pensionable Oxford University weighting of £1,500 a year (pro rata) for grades 1–10; ○ The extension of the discretionary pay scale by one incremental point for grades 6–10; ○ Taking measures to support staff with work visas, parental leave, rental accommodation, workload pressures, and inductions. • Steps towards addressing precarity (1.6): Work within divisions includes the ongoing review of serial fixed-term contracts within MSD, thus far resulting in offers of open-ended contracts to staff who have been on fixed-term contracts for >10 years in approximately half of MSD departments, with some departments initiating the review at four or seven years. In addition, the SSD Research Staff Forum has set up a working group to focus on open-ended contracts.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition (2.1): In 2024, the Vice Chancellor’s Awards included a new category, the Breakthrough Researcher Award, to recognise researchers at the early stages of their careers who have made a significant impact, shown leadership at the University and beyond, and successfully implemented innovative approaches to enhancing research quality. <p>Academic Managers of Researchers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarifying progression pathways and process (2.1): A major project to establish an Academic Career and Reward Framework across Oxford supports our Concordat commitments by seeking to clarify and convey criteria and processes related to reward, recognition, and career progression in academic roles. Following analysis of insights from focus groups and staff engagement, the project Steering Group approved the consultation and implementation timeline for the framework in December 2024. The proposed Framework will be presented for formal consultation in spring 2025, with a view to an implementation timeline being finalised and communicated by the end of the 2024/25 academic year. <p>Researchers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation on policy development (2.1): The Researcher Representational structure is now embedded and has co-created a new Researcher Representatives Toolkit (via peer-to-peer learning); representatives have benefited from new or revitalised induction programs in all divisions, and participated in termly networking events available to all ~85 representatives to enable good-practice sharing. Researchers have been formally consulted on several key research related University policies, including the VC’s Pay and Conditions review, the People Strategy, and this action plan. Research staff have driven new divisional policy, e.g. on teaching opportunities. In recognition of their valuable contributions to improving research culture, the profiles of representatives are showcased on webpages, and an annual research and development allowance of £300–500 for departmental researcher representatives has been introduced or continued by most divisions. Members of the Research Staff Consultation Group continue to be recognised for their more extensive contributions with annual honoraria of £2,000.
Professional development	<p>Institution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bringing the Concordat to life (1.3, 3.1): Oxford’s new Charter, published in October 2024, is a concise document setting out what researchers can expect from the University, including from their PI/line manager, and where their responsibilities lie. The Charter, which is linked to the University’s Staff Handbook, includes the role of annual career development reviews (CDRs) and taking at least 10 days’ professional development time (pro rata) per year. In response to requests from divisions, FAQs have been produced to guide departments in how to enable researchers to plan and take professional development time, including factoring them into CDR conversations.

- **Providing an HR system for managing and recording CDRs and professional development time (1.3, 3.1):** Internal investment from Oxford's digital transformation programme was secured to design and deliver a new module within the University's HR Self-Service online portal, through which researchers can instigate their CDR, engage their reviewer and record key outcomes, including professional development plans. University-wide roll-out is now underway with the aim that all departments adopt the system or are in a position to provide equivalent data on CDRs and professional development by the end of AY 2024/25. Barriers to researchers accessing effective CDRs and/or taking professional development time are recorded by Careers Advisers following 1:1 appointments, and used to update FAQs accordingly.
- **Strengthening cultures of regular development reviews and dedicated time (1.3, 3.1):** MPLS provide termly training on CDRs for reviewees and reviewers, which promotes uptake of development time. SSD held a 'deep dive' workshop with departments to determine the causes underlying slow uptake of 10 days for development. The resulting action plan will: develop a hyperlinked directory of professional development opportunities; collate existing guidance on taking dedicated time; and publish practical suggestions for increasing engagement with the 10 days. MSD identified departmental variation in guidance available to researchers regarding professional development then engaged the MSD Research Staff Forum in creating and sharing generic guidance across all departments. The Humanities division offers researchers an annual Career Conversation with an academic reviewer (line manager or other nominated academic e.g. research director) and is working with faculties to ensure these are available to all researchers.
- **Destination tracking (3.1):** Supported by the University, the MPLS Division commissioned a report by Vitae evaluating the different approaches to researcher career-tracking worldwide with a view to suggesting the optimal approach or approaches to longitudinal career-tracking in the UK. *Towards Systematic Tracking of Researcher Careers: A Scoping Review and Development Plan* was published in October 2024, setting out options to progress this aim. More locally, the Careers Service has launched a closed LinkedIn community for current and alumni researchers which will include the destination of followers and continues to support the postdoc editorial team running the open access site www.research-careers.org, now showcasing 155 profiles of former researchers working in a wide range of sectors and roles beyond academia.

Academic Managers of Researchers

- **[Leading in Academic Research Environments](#) (1.4):** This innovative programme, funded by Wellcome, will offer experienced leaders in research with the opportunity to further develop their leadership

	<p>influence and impact, and to contribute towards the advancement of our research culture in a tailored, peer environment. Co-designed by Oxford academics and leadership experts, this pilot programme will welcome participants in April 2025.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading & Managing People in Research (LMPR) (1.4): One of six modules in the Confident Manager Series. LMPR is tailored specifically for PIs and academic managers and designed to provide participants with essential knowledge and people skills for creating a healthy and productive research environment. Between April 2024 and January 2025, seven sessions took place, with a total of 116 attendees (averaging 16 participants per session). The MSD Inclusive Leadership Programme has expanded in 2024-5 with over 40 academic leaders participating. <p>Researchers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widening career options and strengthening preparedness (3.1): Preparations are underway for the Careers Beyond Academia Conference in March 2025. The Conference will feature talks and panel discussions on sector-specific roles and career paths, as well as an employer fair with representation from various sectors beyond academia. Record numbers of researchers attended the careers fairs in autumn 2024, with over 30 attendees at each pre-fair talk. Furthermore, 1,063 research staff attended 219 Careers Service events that covered a breadth of employment sectors as well as career skills sessions. Many departments have organised targeted networking events to promote insight into diverse career pathways by connecting researchers with alumni and professionals from various sectors. • Tailored careers support (3.2): Specialist researcher careers advisers delivered a total of 1,041 one-to-one careers guidance appointments over the past year, providing direct support to researchers and indirect support to their PIs/line managers. Engagement has climbed throughout the year and in January 2025, 2,495 researchers (52%) had registered on CareerConnect to access appointments, workshops and vacancy listings, 2,060 (83%) of whom opted into the monthly newsletter for researchers. The reach of tailored career development support for researchers and their engagement in these activities has never been higher, and continues to climb. The recent increase in Career Adviser capacity from 1.2 to 1.8 FTE may not be sufficient to keep pace with demand.
	<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. (<i>max 500 words</i>)</p>
	<p>Operating effectively across a large University with a devolved structure has required attentive investment in distributed teamwork. Lessons learnt in the early years include how to consult effectively towards the policy, service or system improvements reported above, and how to keep key stakeholders informed of progress and engaged in meeting</p>

shared challenges. The researcher representation structure, including three inter-linking research staff committees, has provided a conduit for ideas and space for reflection, brain-storming and good-practice sharing. The combination of accountability to, and support from senior leaders (Pro-Vice Chancellors for Research and for People) in progressing the Concordat Action Plan set a clear common direction for our distributed teamwork, while enabling autonomy within divisions and departments to pursue local timescales and priorities. More recently, the systematic mapping of research culture activities and support needs in departments (via the Research Culture Toolkit) is providing the operational insights and opportunities for improvement needed to underpin equity in institutional progress. Throughout, regular coordination amongst central and divisional operational leads has facilitated the co-creation of relevant, accessible outcomes and agreed engagement and communication strategies.

There are sector-wide challenges that Oxford will need to address locally and in collaboration with funders and peer HEIs. Our recent focus on publishing and promoting the Charter for the Career Development of Researchers has illuminated inconsistencies and unclarity on the part of some research funders on whether time spent on professional development which is not directly beneficial to the associated research project can be charged to the funder, thereby preventing the promotion of at least 10 days development as an entitlement for all researchers. The nuanced messaging required adds to the challenges of embedding routine researcher engagement in development opportunities on offer across the University, consistent constraints being workload; the pressure to prioritize research outputs over development and local cultures that unwittingly relegate progression into diverse sectors or roles as having lesser value than progression in academic research.

The report *Towards Systematic Tracking of Researcher Careers: A Scoping Review and Development Plan* concluded that the optimal approach to longitudinal career tracking in the UK is a combination of large-scale surveys and harvesting data from existing datasets. The challenge of creating, piloting, and establishing this aggregation and facilitation approach to career tracking will need cross-sector collaboration with universities, funders, and relevant government bodies. Oxford intends to be a key player in driving the conversation, including the development of funding modules for such future developments.

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

This annual report marks the conclusion of Oxford's Concordat Action Plan 2022–2025 and summarises the significant progress made in fulfilling our initial priorities, due largely to a steady rise in senior stakeholder engagement and internal collaboration involving researchers, academics and professional service teams. In July 2024, the [Research Staff Working Group](#) undertook a deep dive assessment into the 2022–2025 priorities, to identify which have become business as usual; should not be continued; require further action, or have arisen to become new priorities. This assessment formed the basis for creating the next Concordat Action Plan 2025–2030, designed over six months via rigorous institution-wide consultation and consensus-building. The plan will be submitted to People Committee and Research and Innovation Committee for approval, alongside this report.

The proposed Concordat Action Plan will run from 2025 to 2030 in order to align with the next University Strategic Plan, provide time to tackle more challenging structural and cultural issues, and allow activities to be sequenced and reviewed in light of changing priorities or resource levels.

The Concordat Action Plan 2025–2030 will consolidate the progress towards the Concordat Action Plan 2022–2025, prioritising areas that make the greatest difference to researchers’ professional fulfilment and career progression. It will focus on tackling precarity by re-shaping approaches to employment and clarifying career structures; on researcher engagement in CDRs and at least 10 days development, and on equipping academic managers to fulfil their leadership roles. If approved, the Concordat Action Plan 2025–2030 will focus on nine objectives under the three core themes:

1. Environment and Culture
 - 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
 - b. Strengthen the researcher representation framework and effectiveness of governance
 - c. Ensure support for the mental, physical and social wellbeing of researchers within provision for all staff
2. Employment
 - a. Reshape employment approaches and clarify career structures for all career stages
 - b. Improve engagement in and effectiveness of inductions and signposting to key resources
 - 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
3. Career development
 - a. Achieve routine engagement in Career Development Reviews (or equivalents) and professional development
 - b. Continue improving the effectiveness of Career Development Reviews (or equivalents) and professional development
 - c. Strengthen the readiness of all researchers to progress their careers in any role, including mobility in and out of academia

The Plan will align with complementary strategies and concordats such as Oxford’s Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan 2024–2027; the 2019 Concordat to Support Research Integrity; and the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment.

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 P S Grant FREng
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