CONCORDAT TO SUPPORT THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCHERS:

ACTION PLAN (2022–2025)

FOREWORD

The quality of our research relies on a supportive, inclusive, and equitable research culture.

The updated Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, which was released in September 2019, highlights the importance of creating a positive research culture for research staff, particularly for those on fixed-term contracts. Subsequent reports from the Wellcome Trust and UK Research and Innovation similarly provide evidence of the benefits of balancing research productivity with career, professional development, and well-being support for these researchers.

In response to signing the updated Concordat in 2021 and to a focus on research culture more broadly, the University of Oxford is now setting out its action plan for the career development of researchers. Our plan builds on the large amount of existing activity and best practice in researcher support, including that arising from our actions towards fulfilling the commitments under the previous version of this Concordat, and in meeting related Concordats and sector agreements. The plan has been developed in close consultation with fixed-term researchers, principal investigators, and professional services colleagues from all levels and parts of the University. The implementation of the plan will be coordinated centrally to provide consistency and support, but actions will largely be implemented locally through divisions and departments / faculties so that they can be tailored to the needs of differing research disciplines and their research cultures.

In the next three years our actions will work towards **three overarching goals, namely:**

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

Through these actions, we aim to:

- Help researchers to identify and access the development opportunities that they need to achieve the next step in their careers in a variety of sectors or roles;

- Enable researchers to undertake reliable, reproducible, and transparent research so that their research is trusted as meeting the highest standards of academic rigour;

- Recognise the many and varied contributions to research and ensure that a broad range of research activities and career paths are valued and rewarded; and

- Ensure that all stakeholders recognise, and are supported to meet, their obligations under the Concordat.

Implementation of the Concordat action plan will ensure that all researchers can undertake their best research within a stimulating and enabling culture, take responsibility for their own development, and are supported in determining and then achieving their next career steps.

I am most grateful to all researchers, professional services colleagues, and our external advisers for their time and ideas in helping to formulate our Concordat action plan.

Patrick Grant

Professor Patrick Grant
Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research
05 April 2022

Our researcher community

The University of Oxford has around 5,000 fixed-term researchers, mostly at the post-doctoral level, distributed across the University's four academic divisions (Medical Sciences Division; Mathematical, Physical & Life Sciences Division; Social Sciences Division; and Humanities Division), and Gardens, Libraries & Museums, as shown in Chart 1. Our plan will also support those in the Department for Continuing Education. Provision for more than 300 fixed-term researchers employed by colleges includes support from the Researcher Hub, Careers Service and divisional training activity.

We are fortunate that some of the brightest minds come to the University from across the globe (49% of fixed-term researchers are not UK citizens) to conduct their cutting-edge research, making a major contribution to the University's position as one of the world's leading research-intensive universities.

In 2021, 46% of our fixed-term researchers identified as female and 54% as male. Amongst UK researchers, 81% identified as White, 14% as Black or Minority Ethnic (BME), with 5% of undeclared ethnicity. For non-UK researchers, 59% identified as White, 34% as BME and 7% undeclared. Among BME researchers, the largest ethnic group identified as Asian (8% of all fixed-term researchers), followed by Chinese (7%).

Across the University, fixed-term researchers perform a wide array of research roles and many in the Humanities Division do research in the context of a teaching contract. Most are at an early stage in their research careers: ~64% of fixed-term researchers are under 40 years of age, with ~50% in the 30–40 age group; a substantial proportion have contributed to the University's research effort for a sustained period.

Providing an inclusive, supportive, and equitable research culture that values the career and professional development of all our fixed-term researchers is reflected in the University's Strategic Plan (2018–24), particularly Priority 8 ("to enhance the opportunities and support for early-career researchers").

Chart 1: Research Staff Headcount (July 2021)

Bar chart showing research staff headcount by division: MSD 2852, MPLS 1215, SSD 518, HUMANITIES 228, GLAM 25.
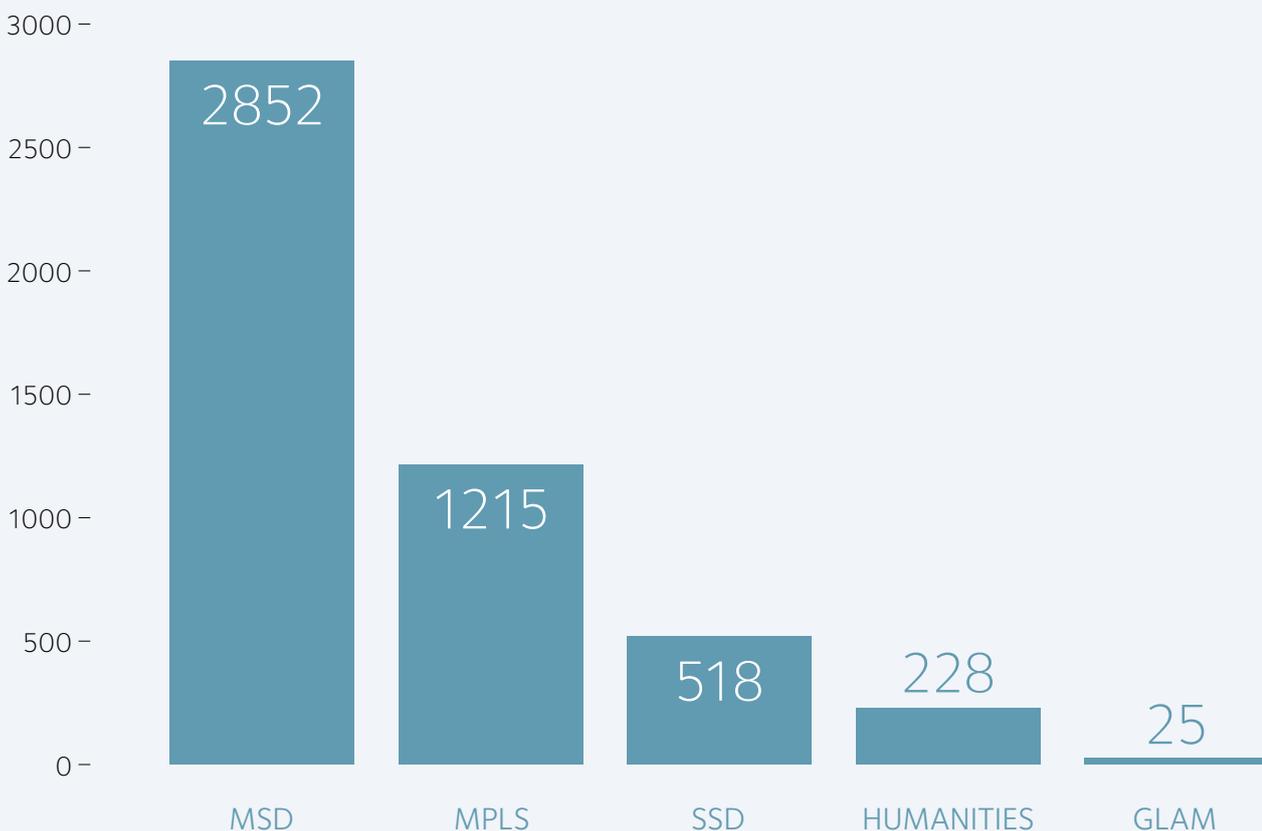
Recognising the importance of research culture

Several existing developments in the University support the Concordat and will help in its implementation:

1

The governance frameworks that support fixed-term researchers have been comprehensively restructured, including the appointment of senior academic staff as Research Staff Advocates at University and divisional level, and ensuring fixed-term researcher representation at all levels of decision-making (e.g. on the University's Council, Research & Innovation Committee, Personnel Committee, and the Nominating Committee for the Vice-Chancellorship).

Researcher Staff Committee Membership
www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/
research-staff-committees

Research Staff Representatives
www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/
research-staff-representatives

2

Working with divisions and Professional Services, the Researcher Hub was established in April 2021. The Hub provides a step-change in the coordination, provision, and visibility of support for fixed-term researchers. The Hub draws together an extensive network of colleagues from divisions, GLAM, Department of Continuing Education and central service departments into a virtual team to support more effectively all aspects of the personal, professional and career development of the University's 5,000 fixed-term researchers.

Researcher Hub
www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/researcher-hub

3

To complement the work of the Hub, and to further emphasise the importance of research culture and associated policy aspects both within the University and to our major external funders, in 2021, Research Services created a new Research Strategy & Policy Unit. The Unit helps to integrate the work of the Hub with other University and divisional work streams relating to research culture and promotes interactions with our research funders and other institutions in this area.

The development of the Concordat action plan

The action plan was developed by a core of thirty-six fixed-term researchers, principal investigators or line managers, and professional services colleagues from across the University, meeting in groups from October to December 2021. Ideas were prioritised by divisional representatives from each peer group by review and group discussion. These priorities were brought together in a draft plan that was shared with divisions, relevant University committees, and an external advisory group. Final approval of the plan was obtained by the University's Personnel Committee and Research & Innovation Committee on 3 March 2022.

CONCORDAT FOR THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCHERS: ACTION PLAN (2022–2025)

This action plan guides work across the University towards 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

The plan focuses on actions that will amplify existing University activity to support researcher career development. The plan will facilitate coordination of the University's response to multiple external commitments of relevance to fixed-term researchers, including the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, the Knowledge Exchange Concordat, the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), HR Excellence in Research award, and Athena Swan and Race Equality Charters.

The University undertakes varied activities to support researcher development; those relevant to the action plan are included in this document.

How to read this plan

In the tables overleaf, the agreed actions are listed alongside indicative implementation activities that were suggested during the consultation process. Individuals within each responsible group — fixed-term researchers, principal investigators or line managers, and professional services staff — will collaborate in creating activities at both the local and institutional level.

Guidance and support in sharing good practice will be provided by the Researcher Hub and the Research Strategy & Policy Unit, working in consultation with the Research Staff Working Group (comprising members from divisions, Careers Service, Equality and Diversity Unit, Human Resources, People & Organisational Development, Research Services, wellbeing support teams, as well as the University and College Union). Completion of each action is expected at the end of the year given in the timescale column: Year 1 equates to April 2023, year 2 to April 2024 etc.

THE ACTION PLAN

1. Creating a research environment that is supportive, inclusive, and equitable

The everyday environment that researchers experience affects their wellbeing, creativity, and career progression. Existing institutional policies to promote a supportive, inclusive and equitable research environment have not always been consistently applied. We will promote the implementation of all applicable policies, and support those with responsibilities for researchers in developing a consistent approach to meeting expectations.

This section supports the University's commitments to Athena SWAN, HR Excellence in Research and the Race Equality Charter.

	ACTION(S)	INDICATIVE ACTIVITIES	OWNER(S)	PROVISIONAL TIMESCALE
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	Provide pre-arrival welcome pack, live inductions, and a range of opportunities to connect new recruits with other researchers across the University Create a map signalling the support available to researchers in developing their research, their careers, and their personal wellbeing, from day one to their next career step	Researcher Hub, People & Organisational Development	Year 1
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	Communicate effectively all policy details, and related activities relevant to fixed-term researchers to this group, their academic managers, and professional services Support researcher representatives and committee chairs to be most effective in their roles Create online resources for sharing cross-sector learning	Researcher Hub, Research Staff Steering Committee	Year 1

	ACTION(S)	INDICATIVE ACTIVITIES	OWNER(S)	PROVISIONAL TIMESCALE
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	Support departments / faculties in facilitating uptake and promoting benefits of professional development Create case studies and media content for researchers and line managers on wide-ranging development options and their benefits	Divisions, Researcher Hub, Human Resources Systems Team	Year 2
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	Include core people-management skills (e.g. active listening, coaching, inclusivity) in inductions and leadership development for principal investigators, academic line managers, and mentors Offer ideas and guidance in promoting wellbeing, equality, diversity & inclusion, and other aspects of a positive research culture to those responsible for researchers	Divisions, People & Organisational Development, Researcher Hub	Year 2
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	Assess viability of a 'Report and Support' system for tracking, reporting on, and addressing concerns Provide specialist central guidance to researchers and to those line-managing researchers Communicate changes made as a result of concerns being raised	Personnel Committee, Human Resources, Equality & Diversity Unit	Year 1
1.6	Progress mechanisms to create greater contractual stability and security for fixed-term researchers, liaising with external funders as appropriate	Continue discussion with funders and peer Universities on progression for a wider variety of roles where appropriate (e.g. staff scientists) Review contract type for researchers who have been on serial contracts over the longer term	Divisions, People & Organisational Development, Researcher Hub	Year 2

2. Recognising and valuing the diverse contributions of researchers

Research is a collaborative endeavour that thrives on rigour and openness; however, there is growing awareness that reward and progression systems may promote inappropriate individualism and excessive speed over collaboration and rigour. In response to these pressures, we will emphasise the importance of meeting the highest standards of academic rigour, recognise and reward broader contributions to research, adapt our policies to the changing nature of research methodologies and publishing, and support the principles of open research and equitable recognition of contributions to research activities.

This section supports the University's commitments to Athena SWAN, Concordat to Support Research Integrity, and the Knowledge Exchange Concordat.

	ACTION(S)	INDICATIVE ACTIVITIES	OWNER(S)	PROVISIONAL TIMESCALE
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	Consult with divisions and departments / faculties and implement a framework for revised criteria for rewarding contributions to research and innovation excellence Reward all fixed-term researchers and academic staff for significant representation and committee roles Ensure all fixed-term researchers are visible on departmental, faculty or research group webpages	Divisions, Research Services, Human Resources	Year 3
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)	Establish clear expectations and support for open research practices, leadership and societal impact (including Knowledge Exchange)	Research Services, Human Resources	Year 2
2.3	Embed tools in institutional systems (e.g. in our publications repository) to highlight and document diverse contributions to excellent research and impact	Implement CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy) to record diverse contributions to research publications and other outputs	Research Services	Year 2

3. Supporting researchers to prepare for their next career step

We will support researchers to make the most of the University's resources to make an informed decision about their next career step and to prepare well for it. We will help researchers to navigate the tension between fulfilling their role requirements, developing research independence, and exploring future career opportunities. We will also help researchers plan and progress their careers with confidence; supporting them in moving into a variety of sectors and roles.

This section supports the University's commitments to Athena SWAN, the Race Equality Charter and the Knowledge Exchange Concordat.

	ACTION(S)	INDICATIVE ACTIVITIES	OWNER(S)	PROVISIONAL TIMESCALE
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	Support line managers, principal investigators, and researchers to have effective conversations about multiple positive career options Celebrate the career destinations of our researchers on group or department / faculty web-pages Explore and implement ways for researchers to enjoy the benefits of the alumni community	Researcher Hub, Careers Service, Development Office; with Divisions	Year 2
3.2	Enhance provision of career development expertise, including from sectors beyond academia	Provide realistic information on diverse career opportunities in all sectors, relevant to disciplinary background Pilot clubs for researchers to engage with employers across sectors of interest	Researcher Hub, Careers Service	Year 2
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	Support departments / faculties in developing local implementation of regular Career Development Reviews, e.g. with materials for reviewees, reviewers, and professional services staff	Divisions, Researcher Hub	Year 2

GOVERNANCE, EVALUATION, AND MONITORING

Implementation of the action plan will start immediately by accelerating initial activities, piloting new ones in different areas of the University, learning what works where and why, and then using such learning from across the wider higher education sector to extend good practice across the University.

This action plan will be coordinated by the Research Strategy & Policy Unit and the Researcher Hub. Collaboration on specific actions involving one or more of the Careers Service, Equality & Diversity Unit, Human Resources, People & Organisational Development, and divisions will be facilitated through the Research Staff Working Group. Each action will be planned, designed, communicated and evaluated with consideration for equity across the fixed-term researcher population. Existing resources will be aligned to address both internal and external drivers (such as other sector-level agreements), with the aim of minimising the need for additional resources in divisions or departments / faculties.

The action plan will be governed through the new research-staff representational structure; the Research Staff Steering Committee (which includes representatives of fixed-term researcher) will have oversight of its implementation and report to Research & Innovation Committee and Personnel Committee.

We will develop quantitative and qualitative indicators (e.g. case studies) to assess the effectiveness of actions, including levels of resourcing, and make adjustments as necessary. We will collect data and analyse how the benefits of and engagement in our activities are distributed across our researcher community, acting as appropriate to promote equity and ensure participation of under-represented groups. Processes for monitoring will be centrally coordinated for consistency and efficiency. We will share good practice to ensure that effective activities become embedded in everyday practice. We will incorporate learning about limited engagement or less successful activity into review conversations with relevant stakeholder groups to guide future planning.

We will track:

- Engagement of researchers, principal investigators/line managers and support staff as appropriate in
  - Professional development activities
  - Career Development Reviews
  - Mechanisms for evidencing diverse contributions to research activity
  - Skills and career development opportunities

- Experiences of fixed-term researchers, principal investigators and line managers in the initiatives listed in the action plan using the staff survey and feedback via the researcher representative structure
- Next career steps of researchers regardless of sector and role
- Resourcing levels, to ensure manageable workloads across the delivery system

REPORTING SCHEDULE AND MODALITY

Progress against actions will be reported annually every April from the publication of this action plan through one document submitted to the following University-level committees.

For interim approval

- Research Staff Consultation Group (comprising fixed-term researchers) >

- Research Staff Steering Committee (governing activity for fixed-term researchers) >

For final approval

- Research and Innovation Committee

- Personnel Committee

Action updates will be posted on the Researcher Hub website after final approval by Research and Innovation Committee and Personnel Committee.

An annual implementation report written by the Research Strategy & Policy Unit and the Researcher Hub will provide accountability to the plan and guidance on any required revisions.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Participatory process used to construct the University's Concordat action plan

www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/researcher-development-concordat

The University's Researcher Hub

www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/researcher-hub

The University's Research Staff Committees

www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/research-staff-committees

Research Staff Representatives across the University

www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/research-staff-representatives

UK Research & Innovation action plan for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/
UKRI-071020-ConcordatToSupportTheCareerDevelopmentOfResearchersFunderActionPlan.pdf