

University of Oxford

HR Excellence in Research Award

Six-year review report

How the internal evaluation was undertaken

including how researchers' views were taken into account during the review and, where relevant, how the review links with existing QA and other implementation/monitoring mechanisms

During the period of the review the University has built excellent communication lines with our research staff body and the evaluation has made full use of these. We have drawn on three main sources: direct consultation with researchers and central officers supporting them; the institutional Staff Experience Survey 2016, and institutional work on Athena SWAN and the Race Equality Charter, the actions and objectives for which overlap significantly with actions that will also benefit researchers.

- Input has been received from senior representatives from each of the academic divisions, representation from both the Oxford Research Staff Society (OxRSS) and the UCU, and officers from a broad range of services which support researchers. In particular, OxRSS' strategic aims were incorporated, and OxRSS representatives have commented on and shaped the actions.
- The 2016 Staff Experience Survey ran in Spring and Summer 2016 in all departments in the University. It included a section of researcher-specific questions, and results were disaggregated by job type so that researchers' particular concerns could be noted. The overall response rate was 47%, which included 1744 research staff (over a third of the total population).
- Work to advance gender and race equality has of course had far-reaching impact beyond women and BME staff: actions and initiatives are aimed at changing the culture and experience for all. In addition, pipeline issues for both groups – with proportionally smaller numbers of women and BME researchers advancing into academic careers, whether academic or research – has led to a number of actions specifically targeted at researchers. We have therefore deliberately included these actions here in order to streamline delivery into a coherent strategy to improve the staff experience across the institution.

Key achievements and progress

Comparison against the original, two-year, and four-year action plans shows excellent progress. Much of the practice introduced and developed in the early stages of Concordat implementation is now embedded and part of normal business; it is also much less a standalone activity than one linked holistically with other initiatives, as described above. These drivers have instigated a marked cultural shift that has seen embedded and proactive researcher development specifically, and attention to staff experience more widely, become the norm rather than the exception. The full action plan, including success against KPIs, can be viewed at www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personnel/staffinfo/resstaff/hrexcellence. Key achievements over the last two years include:

Oxford Research Staff Society

OxRSS, launched with start-up funding and championing at the highest level of the University, has progressed from its foundation five years ago to a flourishing, self-sustaining society with its own website (www.oxrss.ox.ac.uk), Facebook page, and LinkedIn group. Membership and engagement has flourished over the last two years as OxRSS has become increasingly embedded in University life. The energetic and expanded Events team runs regular, well-attended social and professional events,

including a regular, sellout formal college dinner (101 and 128 attended the events in 2016 and 2017). In total, 1530 researchers attended OxRSS events between January 2016 and December 2017, approximately 30% of our researcher population. There is also a 42-strong network of 'voice' representatives, who are linked formally at departmental, divisional, and institutional levels (with OxRSS positions formally established on divisional committees including Maths, Physical and Life Sciences (MPLS) Divisional Board, Medical Sciences Division (MSD) Research Staff Advisory Group, the University's Equality and Diversity Panel, and on the University's Research and Innovation Committee. OxRSS reps are not an 'add-on' but are substantively involved in shaping issues which affect them: representatives sit on a Careers Service working group to advise on provision for research staff; and were invited to join a working group on plans to create a housing development for researchers. (Concordat Principle 2)

Expanded provision to support principal investigators

Provision to support leaders and managers, including PIs, has been a significant focus over the last two years. A new PI programme has been developed and tailored by splitting into two strands to cater for aspiring and existing PIs (Concordat Principle 3). In its first year, 180 researchers chose to join the programme. It includes a new workshop on Leading a Research Team; downloadable induction resources for new PIs, including information on *What is development? Ways that staff can develop, Personal development planning, and Career conversations* (Concordat principle 4). We have developed an online learning community which has over 140 members discussing issues related to being a PI, sharing practice and receiving mutual support. Work is underway to review the feasibility to deliver webinars in 2018, which will allow us to reach a wider audience. And a new Staff Development Website has been launched and publicised so that all staff have access to information and resources. Since the website was launched in January 2017, it has received over 85,000 hits. Most of these have been on the staff apprenticeships page (17%) with 11% of hits on the courses page and 10% on developing myself in my job (Concordat principle 4). Work started in MT 2017 on a revision of this website based on user feedback and subsequent user testing. The new website will be launched by TT 2018.

Pathways: career development workshop for women researchers

This new, two-day workshop for women researchers looking to advance their careers in academia was piloted in 2016. It provides women with the opportunity to consider the academic landscape and their place in it, and then to plan how to progress their individual career pathway. Evaluation of the pilot showed positive impacts on how the participants are thinking about and planning their careers. Pathways has now been embedded as part of the ongoing MPLS Researcher Training programme. It is open to researchers from outside MPLS and there are plans to run it collaboratively with other divisions across the University. There are also plans to further develop the course by including a personal impact session, which will be piloted by the MPLS Division and the Oxford Learning Institute by MT 2018 (Concordat Principle 5).

My Family Care

Launched in 2017, My Family Care (www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personnel/staffinfo/benefits/family/mfc) offers access to emergency back-up childcare and adultcare, a 'speak to an expert' phone line, and a wide range of guides and webinars through a website called the Work + Family space. My Family Care is available to all staff and should help to support researchers with families or caring responsibilities to remain in academia (Concordat Principles 1 and 6).

Divisional and departmental training (Concordat Principles 3 and 4)

- **MPLS** has appointed a full time Researcher Development Manager and ran its first Leadership in Action course for research staff in the summer of 2017; this pilot was a resounding success – among many other things all respondents reported that they now felt

able to apply leadership skills to their current role and beyond. A follow-up session is scheduled for late 2017 to further evaluate impact; and the course has been embedded into the ongoing divisional training programme.

- In June 2016, **MSD** created a joint role of Skills Director and Champion of Research Development and appointed Professor Afsie Sabokbar to the role. Professor Sabokbar created the Research Staff Advisory Group (RSAG), which has representation from every department within the MSD as well as central departments. The committee has met termly and has made a number of significant achievements, including getting divisional approval for all research staff to be allowed five days of professional development and transferable skills development per annum, and running an MSD-specific careers day. MSD has also initiated a site for researchers and aims to improve this further to allow a one-stop-shop for newly-recruited and prospective ECRs. The MSD Researchers' Toolkit link is at: <https://www.medsci.ox.ac.uk/research/researchers-toolkit/researchers-toolkit>
- In addition to the full programme of divisional training events, **Humanities** researchers can participate in the twice-weekly Academic Writing Group (facilitated by an ECR) and attend termly lunches that provide an informal networking opportunity with other post-docs. Other events are developed in response to current issues affecting Humanities ECRs; previous examples include a Q&A on the REF and Open Access; media training; a workshop on 'cracking the US academic job market'; a workshop on improving productivity; and reflective practice workshops for ECRs whose roles incorporate pastoral care responsibilities.
- In **Social Sciences Division**, a wide range of resources, online tools, and training opportunities are being offered across the Division to support skills review and researcher development for individuals at all stages of their careers. In addition to broader skills development, the Division provides a range of briefings and workshops on funding schemes and applications, together with expert seminars relating to research-related topics including Open Access, Leadership, Impact and Engagement, and REF. Over the course of 2016-17, the key post supporting researcher development was restructured to become more senior and strategic. The role now has a clearer focus on the needs of early career researchers as well as doctoral students and incorporates research methods provision (quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods), which had previously been within the remit of a separate postholder. Work has also been undertaken to understand and further develop good practice in relation to career development reviews for social sciences research staff, and in support of wider equality objectives.

First institutional Staff Experience Survey

The introduction of a single survey for all University staff will provide an efficient and coherent mechanism to monitor progress and to ensure that future initiatives continue to address the needs of researchers. Taking the principles of CROS and PIRLS (including some specific questions) and combining them with other staff experience questions will allow us to identify holistic and nuanced areas for attention that are commensurate with the diverse and multifaceted nature of our research staff. The survey uses a fixed question set which allows departments to add their own questions, meaning the survey is owned at a local level but can be aggregated at institutional level. For the pilot survey we received an excellent response rate across the institution of 47% (over 6000 responses), and seek to improve this to 50% in 2018. See

www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/inpractice/staffexperiencesurvey. (Concordat Principle 7)

2018-20 Action Plan

As is evident in our updated action plan and the highlights above, researcher development is embedded extensively in our policies and practice. Following a discussion with divisions held in June 2017 and led by Oxford's Pro Vice Chancellor for Research, the University has reconfigured the

Research Staff Working Group (RSWG) into a revised forum, the Early Career Researcher Development Forum (ECRDF). The ECRDF reports into the Research and Innovation Committee in order to reflect the closer working relationship which RSWG had developed with that committee's strategic priorities. ECRDF has overseen this submission and it is intended that the forum will now agree a strategy and plan of work, rooted in this action plan and the University's agreed Code of Practice for the employment and career development of research staff. This work will start in HT 2018 with a draft strategy and plan produced by HT 2019 (Concordat Principle 4). Within an overall framework of policies and procedures determined by the University, the academic divisions and departments are responsible for setting their own research priorities and managing their resources with support provided by the central University, including recruiting, managing, and developing researchers. In addition, departments' engagement with the Athena SWAN initiative means that policies, processes, and culture are being examined for all staff, and this local ownership is where much of the practice that goes towards achieving these objectives is situated. This strategy and action plan therefore focus on institutional level policy and initiatives which complement the support at local level underpinned by departmental and divisional researcher development strategies in their particular contexts (Concordat Principles 3 and 4).

Situating our progress as an institution within the framework of the four-year strategy set out in 2016 shows that we have made excellent progress in particular against the *Representation* and *Management and Leadership* aims, as the highlights above show. There has also been significant progress against the *Transparency* and *Parity of Experience* aims, in particular regarding PDR (with researchers within MPLS now entitled to have an annual CDR). Nevertheless, we would like to see greater evenness and equality across the spectrum of support offered – from the one to one relationship with an individual PI, to the extent to which policies are consistently made and implemented.

We continue to strengthen our work on *Representation* and *Management and Leadership*. Our aims are to strengthen representation in terms of numbers of reps, and to enhance and amplify voice through representation by working on the specific objectives set out in sections 1 and 3 of our Action Plan by MT 2020 (Concordat Principles 2 and 5)

We focus our 2018-20 action plan mainly on *Transparency* and *Parity of Experience*. We draw on initiatives aimed at individual researchers' development as well as work being undertaken through Athena SWAN and the Race Equality Charter. Our aims are to clarify the purpose and remit of a reshaped forum for early career researcher development and agree an outline strategy for the forum's work by HT 2019, and to share the learning from a range of career development initiatives across the University to inform planning and delivery as set out in sections 2 and 4 of our Action Plan (Concordat Principles 2 and 4).