



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

University of Oxford Research Culture Toolkit

RESOURCES TO IMPROVE SELF-
REFLECTION, SHARING AND RIGOUR IN
DEPARTMENTAL RESEARCH CULTURE

JUNE 2026

Summary

The University of Oxford Research Culture Toolkit ('Toolkit') is a collaborative university-wide project to provide a consistent approach to surfacing, sharing, supporting and evidencing priorities and activities that strengthen positive, inclusive research cultures.

Launched in 2024, the Toolkit was designed to clarify what research culture encompasses, map existing activity, and highlight both strengths and gaps in everyday practice across the University's academic departments. It includes a suite of 'tools': resources for departments to collate and reflect on their activities to strengthen the research environment and to support rigour and evaluation.

This report provides a summary of the 'tools' and how they can be used, with example materials shared in the Appendix.

The Toolkit has been evaluated iteratively, combining pilot feedback, structured self-reflection and wider validation to assess its effectiveness.

More than 80% of academic departments at the University of Oxford used the Toolkit in 2025.



Duncan Mortimer, University of Oxford

Background

The University of Oxford is a very large research-intensive university with more than 15,000 researchers (research-only staff, teaching and research staff, and post-graduate research students, 2024/25). Most research is conducted in 52 departments in four academic divisions, as well as research activity in the Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM), Colleges, and Oxford Lifelong Learning. There are diverse and vibrant local and disciplinary research cultures, and many of the activities that shape the research environment happen within departments.

Oxford's research culture programme is united around three interconnected priorities:

Research practice: enabling researchers to conduct rigorous, reliable, and transparent research and innovation.

Valuing contributions: recognising the broad range of talents, skills, outputs and contributions needed for research and innovation to flourish.

Careers: assessing research fairly and inclusively, in an equitable working environment, and supporting the community in their career aspirations.

The Research Culture Toolkit ('Toolkit') project was conceived in 2023, designed in early 2024, and launched university-wide in 2025. The goals of the Toolkit are to strengthen and to capitalise on the wealth of local research culture innovation and activity, using the findings and learning to further improve the research environment at university-wide scale.

Project aims:

- provide clarity on the scope of research culture;
- map activity related to research culture and strengthening research environments;
- surface and share good practice;
- identify gaps and how they could be supported;
- support efficiency and strategic investment in research culture decision-making and activities at appropriate levels within the university; and,
- improve readiness for the REF 2029 submission.

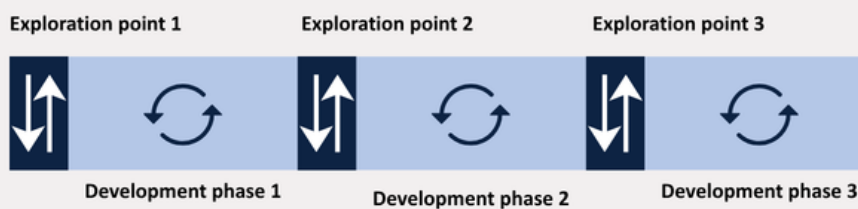


Project team spans all four main academic divisions and University Administration and Services.

The University has academic and professional services leadership roles and governance structures for research environment and culture both centrally and within the divisions and departments. The Toolkit project has been collaboratively delivered by a small cross-university team, including central Research Services and the academic divisions, particularly the Research Culture Facilitators. This team structure has brought together strategic coordination, disciplinary expertise, and the capacity for broad reach across our large, decentralised university. The Toolkit project reports to the University’s Research and Innovation Committee.

Timeline

The overall timeline of the Toolkit implementation is three ‘exploration points’ focused on department discussions and self-reflection, at intervals of at least a year (see figure). In between exploration points, there are ‘development phases’ to support activity that strengthens the research environment. Regular feedback and learning are integrated, including at a university-wide one-day conference that was held in June 2025 and through local reporting after each exploration point. A project timeline is in [Appendix A](#).



Schematic figure of the phases of Research Culture Toolkit interactions with departments.



What is in the Toolkit and how does it work?

Tool 1: The Topics

Purpose: To give departments clarity on the scope to consider when they reflect on elements of their research culture.

Tool: A list of 14 Topics aligned to the three priority areas of the University's research culture programme. Within each Topic, there is a list of suggested sub-topics ('indicative areas') to further clarify the scope. The Topics are used as the framework throughout the Toolkit. Find the Topics list in [Appendix B](#).

Tool 2: The Template

Purpose: To provide departments with a simple, structured method for self-reflection and information gathering.

Tool: An editable document that is framed by the Topics, with Topic-specific and general prompt questions and a checklist for baseline practices. The questions focus on how the department is enhancing each area of research culture, what challenges they have identified, and what support is needed for improvement. Find an example section from the Template in [Appendix C](#).

Tool 3: The Facilitated Conversations Guide

Purpose: To guide a department through self-reflection on the priorities and approaches across a range of research culture topics.

Tool: Prompt questions for a Research Culture Facilitator (or similar) to use in conversations to introduce the Research Culture Toolkit to departmental colleagues, and to help to populate the Template through discussion. Find Facilitated Conversation example questions in [Appendix D](#).



Over 80% of departments completed self-reflection template during first iteration of the Toolkit exercise.

Tool 4: Inspiration Bank and Resources Library

Purpose: To provide departments with clear signposting to internal information related to research culture (Resources Library) and ideas of practices to strengthen research culture amongst departments (Inspiration Bank).

Tool: Curated Intranet (SharePoint) pages, organised by the Topics. These include short summaries of promising practices in the Inspiration Bank and links to guidance, information, policies and training in the Resources Library. Our signposting is currently for internal information and we hope to share more soon.

Tool 5: The DECIDE Guide

Purpose: To provide departments with a simple method for strategic planning for research culture action.

Tool: We identified a need to support departments in strategic and evidence-informed planning of where and how to focus local research culture activities. DECIDE is a simple acronym as a thinking-tool for planning. Find the DECIDE Tool in [Appendix E](#).

More **Tools** are in development, including on Evaluation for research culture projects.

An example from the Inspiration Bank

Research practice



Culture of collaboration









Culture of impact and engagement



Environmental sustainability

Valuing Diverse Contributions

Inclusive environment

-  During employment | HR Support
-  Equality and Diversity Unit
-  Training & mentoring | Equality and Diversity Unit
-  Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Resources (MSD)
-  Report + Support
-  MSD Mediation Service
-  Resolution Service (MPLS)
-  Inclusive management | Equality and Diversity Unit
-  Mental Health and Wellbeing Resources (MPLS)
-  Thriving at Oxford: Staff Wellbeing Programme
-  Research Equity Resources
-  Researcher Hub
-  Researcher Networks
-  Professional Services networks

Representation and voice in decision-making

-  Research Staff Representatives
-  Supporting Technicians at Oxford
-  Inclusive Chairing Toolkit
-  Growing good governance at Oxford

Research leadership

-  Researcher Leadership and Management Courses
-  Leadership Framework
-  Inclusive Leadership Programme
-  Leading in Academic Research Environments (Wellcome)
-  The Confident Manager Series

An example from the Resources Library

What have we done and learnt?

- A pilot with eight departments informed useful iteration of the Toolkit, and the collaborative institution-wide approach enabled its prompt introduction to all departments (Exploration point 1). By May 2025, 42 departments had provided information on their research culture activities.
- The project team analysed information gathered from Exploration point 1 and hosted a 'Research Culture at Oxford: What's Next?' event in June 2025 to identify and prioritise areas that would benefit from coordinated interventions, as they apply in many areas of the university.
- The Toolkit project has added to our overall picture of how research culture is being considered within departments across the University. We identified where there are broad similarities in areas of progress or concern, and where the local context – departmental structure, size, and discipline – is important for shaping the focus or specific challenges.
- Key areas of follow-up action included improved mechanisms for practice sharing and more 'tools' for research culture-related planning and evaluation.
- In June 2026, the Toolkit was awarded the University's Vice-Chancellor's Research Culture Award, which recognizes those who have contributed to a positive, inclusive, and equitable research culture.



~120 stakeholders attended the June 2025 'Research Culture at Oxford' event.

Project team

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Team members receiving the Vice-Chancellor's Research Culture Award, 2026

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Appendices

Appendix A: Research Culture Toolkit Project timeline, to summer 2026

Date	Activity
Late 2023	Conceptual development
Jan 2024	Project approved by Research and Innovation Committee
Feb–Jun 2024	Toolkit design, informed by expert input; Engagement with stakeholders
Jun–Aug 2024	Pilot in 8 departments (two per academic division to give disciplinary spread)
Sep–Oct 2024	Revisions in response to pilot feedback
Nov 2024–Mar 2025	University-wide roll-out (Exploration point 1): Research Culture Facilitators introduce the Toolkit to each department; Departments provide information via facilitated conversations and template
Apr–May 2025	Analysis of information from departments
Jun 2025	Event: ‘Research Culture at Oxford: What’s Next?’ to share and discuss Toolkit findings
Jul–Sep 2025	Identification of priority actions based on Toolkit findings
Oct 2025	Project update to Research and Innovation Committee
Dec 2025	Internal project report shared with departments
Jan–Mar 2026	Minor Toolkit revisions based on learning from Exploration point 1 and additional knowledge
Apr–Jul 2026	Inspiration Bank refresh to increase sharing across departments
May–Jul 2026	Exploration Point 2: departments update Toolkit templates; departments are provided with further tools
Throughout	Research Culture Facilitators supporting departments to address needs (Development phases)

Appendix B: Tool 1 – The Topics

The Topics are used as a framework within the Research Culture Toolkit, to indicate the scope. Within each Topic, there is a list of suggested sub-topics ('indicative areas') to further clarify the scope. An example of Indicative Areas for one topic is shown below.

Topics

The Topics are organised by the three interconnected priorities of the University of Oxford's research culture programme.

- **Research practice:** enabling researchers to conduct rigorous, reliable, and transparent research and innovation.
- **Valuing contributions:** recognising the broad range of talents, skills, outputs and contributions needed for research and innovation to flourish.
- **Careers:** assessing research fairly and inclusively, in an equitable working environment, and supporting the community in their career aspirations

Research Culture priority area	Topic
Research practice	Conducting rigorous, responsible and transparent research
	Culture of collaboration
	Culture of impact and engagement
	Environmental sustainability
Valuing diverse contributions	Visibility
	Representation and voice in decision making
	Inclusive environment
	Research leadership
Supporting careers	Clear, inclusive and sustainable career paths
	Career and professional development
	Support for funding applications
Research culture communication and engagement	Setting expectations for research culture
	Communication routes
Strategy	Strategic approach to research culture

Example of Indicative Areas

Lists of indicative areas are used to indicate potential scope, but are not comprehensive. Links to more information about indicative areas were provided for internal users.

Conducting rigorous, responsible and transparent research

Indicative areas: Research integrity, ethics, reproducibility, responsible research and innovation; EDI in research design; raising concerns, training, awareness of policies; developing policies specific to the discipline; approaches to data management; sharing research materials and/or data; data availability statements; pre-prints, pre-registering a study plan and/or publishing a Registered Report; compliance with open access requirements; rights retention; using ORCID; inclusive authorship (e.g. use of CRediT taxonomy); valuing a wide range of types of outputs

Appendix C: Tool 2 – The Template

This is an example extract from the Research Culture Toolkit Template, which is used by departments for self-reflection on their research culture activities. The Template includes a similar section for each Topic.

Research Practice

Conducting rigorous, responsible and transparent research

Questions to reflect on	Indicative areas to consider
How are you encouraging responsible conduct of research?	Research integrity, ethics, reproducibility, responsible research and innovation; EDI in research design; raising concerns, training, awareness of policies; developing policies specific to the discipline; approaches to data management; sharing research materials and/or data; data availability statements; pre-prints, pre-registering a study plan and/or publishing a Registered Report; compliance with open access requirements; rights retention; using ORCID; inclusive authorship (e.g. use of CRediT taxonomy); valuing a wide range of types of outputs
How are open research and open access supported?	
How are researchers encouraged to think broadly about types of outputs from research?	

Contact person(s):

Please indicate if your department is implementing the following baseline practices/policies:

Practice or policy	Yes	No	Don't Know	N/A
Compliance with relevant Research integrity and Ethics policies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Compulsory Research integrity training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Compliance with relevant Open Access requirements (e.g., Open Access publications policy)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Oxford-affiliated ORCID	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Beyond these practices/policies, how is your department enhancing this area of research culture? (Where possible, please include evidence of efficacy.)

What challenges have you identified, and what support is needed for improvement? (Please include any relevant evidence, such as feedback from town hall events, pulse/staff experience surveys, staff or student representatives, or other sources.)



Case studies

Please share further information on your planning, approach and evidence for a small number of example projects or areas of activity (e.g., two examples). The case study template can be used as a framework, but you may need to adapt and/or leave some parts blank, depending on the stage the project is at. Please consider including information that would enable others to learn from this example.

Title:

Brief description of the project or activity

Why did you conduct this project?

What factors were considered in the design? (e.g., EDI, audience, communications)

How did you evaluate it and what did you find? (e.g., level of engagement, efficacy)

What were the outcomes?

What are your next steps? (e.g., how will the evaluation inform further actions or improvements?)

Appendix D: Tool 3 – The Facilitated Conversations Guide

Interactions with departments during the Research Culture Toolkit project include conversations with Research Culture Facilitators, to discuss departmental approaches to research culture. Here we have provided examples of conversation prompts for: 1) an introductory meeting; and 2) follow-up conversations focused on specific Topics. These prompts are illustrative rather than comprehensive.

1) Introductory meeting with a department

- What is the approach to leadership and governance for research culture? Who is driving activity?
- Are there any allocated resources (people or funds)?
- Is there a departmental strategy, action plan or set of priorities for research culture? If so, how were these identified and what is the scope?
- What information and evidence do you have about how people in the department are experiencing and shaping research culture?
- Are there any particular features of your department or discipline that effect the research culture people experience or your approach to research culture work (e.g., the structure, the type of research, the distribution of resourcing)?
- Could you highlight (e.g., two) areas where you feel that you are making progress? What is the evidence you have?
- Could you highlight (e.g., two) areas of research culture that remain particularly challenging? Why? What is the evidence?

2) Topic-focused meetings

These are example prompts to use in meetings focused on particular Topics.

Reassure departments that it is expected that they may have limited detail to share on some topics; we encourage honesty about the limitations on what they have capacity to do, barriers they are encountering, etc.

- Has anything already been entered on the Template for Topic X?
 - No – start with the ‘question to reflect on’, as in the Template
 - Yes – ask follow-up questions about the information given, and questions on indicative areas.

Example questions that can be used for any topic:

- Why did you decide to do X? (e.g., evidence of need)
- How did you go about designing X?
- Who was the intended audience and how was it communicated? What was the level of engagement?
- How was EDI considered?
- What were the outcomes? Is there any evidence of change? (Adapt if the activity is at an early stage.)
- How is evaluation being used to inform further improvements?

Or

- Are you encountering any barriers in this area?
- Is there any specific support or information you would like in this area?

Examples of Topic-specific prompt questions

Representation and voice in decision making

- Do you have representatives from different staff and student groups on key committees (e.g., researchers, technical staff, research-related roles etc)?
- Are you taking any actions to diversify governance?

Support for funding applications

- How is EDI considered in supporting funding applications?
- How are decisions made on who is supported to apply for fellowships and other funding opportunities?
- Are you taking any action to increase applications from diverse groups (career stage, role type, gender, etc)?

DECIDE

SUPPORT FOR RESEARCH CULTURE PLANNING



Appendix E: Tool 5 – The DECIDE Guide

DECIDE is an acronym to provide departments with a simple method for strategic planning for research culture action.



RESEARCH CULTURE

Research culture refers to how research is conducted and supported. The University of Oxford has three interconnected research culture priorities:

RESEARCH PRACTICE

Enabling researchers to conduct rigorous, reliable and transparent research and innovation.

VALUING CONTRIBUTIONS

Recognising the broad range of talents, skills, outputs and contributions needed for research and innovation to flourish.

CAREERS

Assessing research fairly and inclusively, in an equitable working environment, and supporting the community in their career aspirations.



RESEARCH
PRACTICE



VALUING
CONTRIBUTIONS



SUPPORTING
CAREERS



WHAT TO PRIORITISE? HOW TO DECIDE?

BREADTH OF RESEARCH CULTURE

The breadth of research culture means there is no expectation that focus can be given to all areas at once.

STRATEGIC APPROACH NEEDED

Select evidence-informed priority areas, where there is a change you would like to reflect on, or enact, that complements or fits around existing priorities.

USE THIS TOOL TO HELP YOU DECIDE

This tool facilitates reflection on research culture priorities and activities so that you can make strategic, evidence-informed decisions. This is a starting point to support you with sustaining a positive research culture and creating impact.



RESEARCH
PRACTICE



VALUING
CONTRIBUTIONS



SUPPORTING
CAREERS



DEFINE PRIORITIES

- Align your research culture priorities with your department's research mission, strategy, priorities and values.
- Consider how your efforts can advance Oxford's three interconnected priorities for research culture.

EVIDENCE THE NEED

- Take an evidence-based approach to identify needs or challenges in your department.
- Prioritise areas of research culture where there is a risk related to not taking action.

CHOOOSE ACTIVITIES

- Select a small number of strategic activities to address your evidence-based priorities.
- Maximise your resources by adopting, collaborating, and expanding on activities that are already underway or starting new small-scale actions.

IDENTIFY IMPACT

- Plan evaluation of your activities before you start delivery.
- Set a clear goal for impact and the change that you aim to enact.
- Pick a simple method of evaluation that will allow you to collect the data you need to demonstrate impact.

DELIVER ACTIVITIES

- Test and iterate your activities: learn from what you try and make improvements as you go.
- Many activities don't have to be perfect from the outset. It can be helpful to get new activities started with a pilot phase.

ENGAGE CONSISTENTLY

- Use consistent, frequent internal communication about positive research culture so that it becomes integrated as 'business as usual.'
- Support, reward and celebrate research culture activities.
- Share your approaches with others.

Contact

For more information about the Research Culture Toolkit project and Oxford's work on the research environment, contact mary.muers@admin.ox.ac.uk or researcherhub@admin.ox.ac.uk

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