

FAQs for the ‘10 Days’ of Professional Development Time for Researchers

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1. Background

a) What is the purpose of these FAQs and who are they for?

This guidance supports departments/faculties, researchers and their line managers/Principal Investigators (PIs) to enable researchers to use at least 10 days for professional development. This aligns with the University's commitments as a signatory to the national [Researcher Development Concordat](#) and Oxford's own [Charter for the Career Development of Researchers](#) and [Concordat Action Plan \(2022-2025\)](#).

Please note: this document has been designed as general central guidance, which can be customised by department/faculty support staff, as necessary. However, for equity reasons, any customisation should avoid contradictory guidance to this FAQ. Please refer to local departmental/faculty guidance, where available/more appropriate.

If you have any feedback on these FAQs or would like a question added, please email researcherhub@admin.ox.ac.uk.

b) Why is professional development time for researchers important?

There is increased recognition that development opportunities expand researchers' professional skill sets, lead to better job satisfaction and feeling valued at work, which in turn strengthens creativity, performance and career prospects. They also nurture better leaders and attract the best talent.

The University recognises that world-leading research comes from a world-leading research culture. This is why research organisations and funders nationally and internationally are incentivising and rewarding an academic culture that values not only the research that we do, and the impact it makes, but also the process of doing research, including how we support the people who conduct research. (For example, the [Research Excellence Framework](#) (REF) 2029 is placing a higher weighting of 25% on the People, Culture and Environment section of the overall institutional assessment than in previous assessment exercises.)

It is particularly important for researchers to have dedicated time to develop a range of employability skills and to consider several career paths. 88% of researchers at Oxford are on fixed-term contracts.¹ Steady growth in the number of researchers across the Higher Education sector means that opportunities to move into more senior or secure academic roles are relatively scarce. This new reality is acknowledged by both funders and employers, with a concomitant expectation of career mobility.

2. Defining researchers and professional development

a) What is the definition of a researcher for the purposes of professional development?

For the purposes of the '10 days' of professional development time at Oxford, researchers are defined as staff who satisfy all the criteria below:

- Individuals whose primary responsibility is to conduct research and who are employed specifically for this purpose;

¹ [Equality, diversity & Inclusion Report 2022-2023](#)

- Who are employed on fixed-term contracts, or open-ended externally-funded contracts;
- Are employed on posts within grades 6–9 (inclusive); and
- Where the post is within staff classification codes [AP or AR](#).

Some funders, departments/faculties may also choose to extend the ‘10 days’ of professional development to a wider group of staff, e.g. staff involved in teaching and research.

Please note that the Charter only covers staff who are employed by the University. Researchers who are employed by colleges (e.g. Junior Research Fellows) should speak to their college about what is provided for them.

b) What is professional development?

The [Researcher Development Concordat](#) defines ‘10 days’ of professional development as an allowance for researchers to develop their professional competencies and gain experience to support their future career (whether in academia or beyond).

Professional development time enables development that extends beyond the training requirements for a researcher’s current role, however it may include required training where there is crossover with the individual’s own professional development plans.

Some departments/faculties or external organisations might use a different term to refer to professional development, e.g. continuing professional development (CPD), professional and career development.

c) What are examples of professional development?

Examples of professional development:

- participating in conferences (in addition to any required by the day job)
- developing new research collaborations
- writing/developing funding applications for new projects
- joining a committee/being a researcher representative
- contributing to policy development, public engagement or knowledge exchange
- undertaking training courses
- workplace shadowing
- mentoring/being a mentee

This list is not exhaustive and some funders/schemes might have specific guidance on professional development activities.

For more ideas, please visit the following pages:

- Researcher Hub ([Professional Development for Researchers](#)) including [testimonials](#) on the benefits of various activities to researchers from each Division
- Divisional, department/faculty researcher professional development pages
- [Careers Service](#) for researchers
- [People & Organisational Development](#) (POD)

3. Agreeing professional development activities

a) How are professional development activities established?

A researcher should lead the conversations on their professional development plans, with support/guidance from their line manager/PI and/or another experienced member of the University. Annual Career Development Reviews (CDR) or equivalent, Personal Development Reviews (PDR), probation reviews and regular 1:1 meetings are ideal times to have these discussions.

A researcher and their line manager/PI should discuss the following points/topics/issues when agreeing/[recording](#) activities:

- professional development that the researcher is already engaged in and also supports their future professional development plans;
- any funder or contractual terms and conditions relating to professional development;
- any specific professional development guidelines from the department/faculty;
- appropriate timing;
- whether a [conflict of interest](#) plan is required; and
- whether a risk assessment or insurance is required.

Each situation will be different, so a flexible approach to professional development is recommended.

For instance, if a researcher would like to complete a project management or business-related course, but the funder is unable to fund the salary or the course fees, then a line manager/PI and researcher could identify opportunities for the researcher to develop the relevant skills within their current work and align with the research outcomes, e.g. developing a delivery plan for an aspect of the research project, costing up a collaborative research proposal, managing budgets or timelines with guidance from a colleague experienced in project management.

b) What if there is a difference of opinion regarding appropriate professional development?

If differences of opinion cannot be resolved in discussion between the researcher and their line manager/PI, they should speak to their department/faculty [HR lead](#) for further advice. Some departments/faculties may have specific guidance on how to raise any issues or concerns, for instance speaking to their department/faculty leadership.

For any differences of opinion, it is recommended that this is recorded in writing, e.g. via email.

4. Funding professional development time, training & travel

a) Will researchers be paid their normal salary when taking time for professional development?

Major UK funders have signed the [Researcher Development Concordat](#), or support its principles, and will fund the salary of researchers with professional development time built

into salaries. However, it is important to check the terms and conditions of the funder when first planning a grant application, budgets and timelines.

Where a funder explicitly states that they will not pay the salary for time spent on the proposed development activities, the line manager/PI and researcher should consider:

- Seeking additional funding avenues where available.
 - Note that Oxford's internal funds have specific purposes that may suit the researcher's broader career plans and offer accompanying skill development opportunities. For guidance see: [Internal funding | Research Support \(ox.ac.uk\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk).
- Other activities that will be supported.
- Adjusting project timelines or budget to enable researchers to take professional development time.
- Speaking to their [HR lead](#), and if necessary, their department/faculty leadership for support.
 - Please see the following question for more details.

b) Is there a list of funders who do and do not fund professional development time?

Information on what we know about major funder positions is being drawn up. To inform this work, department/faculty research support/facilitation/management colleagues should contact the Research Funding & Contracts Team in Research Services (katie.price@admin.ox.ac.uk), if they identify a funder or scheme that explicitly **does not** fund researcher salaries for professional development time.

c) What do we do if the funder does not refer to professional development time in their terms and conditions?

Please discuss with research support/facilitation/management colleagues in your department/faculty or division.

d) Is project-specific or required training different to professional development and how should the former be funded?

Yes. Some research projects will require project-specific training in order to meet their objectives, e.g. technical lab training, safety training. The time and fees to cover project-specific training should generally be considered separately to professional development time when planning projects. Please check the funder's terms and conditions.

e) Is there funding to cover fees e.g. for professional memberships, conferences, training and travel?

Some funders will cover costs that are project-specific and/or part of professional development. Please check their terms and conditions (noting possible tax implications in the case of some professional memberships; please see [Miscellaneous expenses: claimant guide](#) for any advice needed.

Where funders do not fund such costs, the researcher or the line manager/PI should consider seeking additional funding, where available.

Similar training might be available at no cost through divisional or central providers within the University – see [Training and development providers for staff page](#). Researchers can also visit the Researcher Hub's [Professional Development Planning for Researchers](#) page, which lists some examples of free professional development activities.

Researchers should also consider [Government routes](#) to claim tax relief for job expenses, such as professional fees and subscriptions if they have paid these fees to do their job.

f) What role do funders have in the Researcher Development Concordat?

If a funder is a [Researcher Development Concordat](#) signatory, the Concordat states that they are expected to:

1. *Incorporate specific development requirements in relevant funding calls, terms and conditions, grant reporting, and policies. This should include researchers' engagement in a minimum of 10 days' professional development pro rata per year and evidence of effective career development planning.*
2. *Embed the Concordat Principles and researcher development into research assessment strategies and processes.*
3. *Acknowledge that a large proportion of the researchers they fund will go on to careers beyond academia and consider how they can encourage and support this within their remit.*

Not all of our funders are currently [Concordat signatories](#) and therefore may not fund the salaried time for a researcher to engage in professional development. Please see question: [Is there a list of funders who do and do not fund professional development time?](#) for more details.

5. Recording/reporting professional development time

a) I work at departmental/faculty level: how do researchers record/report their professional development?

Some funders and/or departments/faculties will have guidance on recording and reporting professional development. We recommend continuing to use these while a new module on the HR system (PeopleXD) is being developed. Please see the next question.

The project team will be in touch with each department/faculty with further details during MT 24.

b) Will a central system be provided to record professional development?

It has been agreed that the University-wide HR system (PeopleXD) will be used to enable professional development recording for ease and consistency across the institution. (This initiative supports the University's [Concordat Action Plan](#) and submission to REF 2029.)

Roll-out will be by clusters of departments, beginning in Michaelmas term 2024. In the interim, it is not recommended to enter into new licence agreements or to set up new TeamSeer systems for recording professional development. For queries regarding the roll-out in PeopleXD, please see the [project page](#) or contact researchercareerpathwayproject@it.ox.ac.uk.

A central system will help researchers track their own investment in professional development, providing them with prompts for their curriculum vitae (CV). It will also help departments/faculties, divisions and central teams to understand researcher development interests/activities across the University and help with potential funder reporting.

6. Operational questions

a) What is considered a 'day' for Concordat-related professional development?

A 'day' is considered 7.5 hours (pro rata for part-time staff). The guideline of at least 10 days per year, should be prorated for part-time staff.

b) From which date do we calculate professional development time (pro-rata)?

We recommend using the University leave calendar (1st October – 30th September). A consistent approach will help with institutional reporting to research funders, the REF, etc. The '10 days' should be prorated for part-time staff, or for part-years (contracts starting or ending within the leave year).

c) Does a researcher's professional development time carry over to the next year if they do not use it?

The purpose of allocating professional time each year is to enable researchers to invest in developing themselves as a matter of routine, starting at the beginning of their contracts.

For this reason, unused professional development time should not be carried over into the next year, however a line manager/PI can use their discretion in exceptional circumstances, e.g. taking into account family/sick leave. They might also need to check with the funder before agreeing any carry-over.

d) Why is it '10 days'?

The [Researcher Development Concordat](#) recommends at least '10 days' of professional development to support researchers. This is likely to incorporate professional development activities that the researcher is already doing. The provision exists to ensure researchers make a conscious effort to think about how they are stretching themselves, developing their professional competencies and gaining experience to support their future career (in academia or beyond).

7. More support

a) What if a researcher needs help creating a professional development plan?

More inspiration can be found on:

- the Researcher Hub's '[Planning your professional development](#)' page;
- [Research Careers](#), where researchers who have moved from academia to a range of other sectors, highlight their transferable skills; and
- the [Careers Service](#).

A researcher may consider speaking to a few different people to form a balanced professional development plan. Below are some suggestions:

- line manager/PI
- careers adviser for researchers (based in the [Careers Service](#) and/or dept/faculty)
- mentor
- someone in a role that the researcher would like to learn more about
- local [HR lead](#)
- [Department/faculty researcher rep](#)
- [Academic Advocate/Champion](#)
- [Research culture colleague](#)
- [Researcher Hub](#)

b) Where can we find testimonials from researchers who have benefitted from undertaking professional development?

Please see the testimonials section on the Researcher Hub's [Professional Development Planning for Researchers](#) page.

c) Where can we go for more support?

The University recognises that department/faculties may be at different stages of implementing the '10 days' of professional development time. Below is a guide for finding more support, based on your role, however each department/faculty may have a specific process for raising questions/concerns.

RESEARCHERS:

- For any questions, researchers should speak to their line manager/PI in the first instance.
- If they need any additional support, they should speak to their department/faculty [HR lead](#).
- Where necessary, they may also need to contact their department/faculty leadership (e.g. Head of Department/Faculty Board Chair).

LINE MANAGER/PIs:

- For **funder-related** questions, line managers/PIs should speak to their departmental/faculty research support/facilitation/management colleagues.
- For **HR-related** questions, line managers/PIs should speak to their departmental/faculty [HR lead](#).
- Where necessary, they may also need to contact their department/faculty/divisional leadership (e.g. Head of Department/Faculty Board Chair, Registrar etc).

HR COLLEAGUES

- For **HR-related** questions that are not answered in this FAQ, HR colleagues are advised to use their normal escalation points for advice or speak to their [divisional research culture colleague](#) or the [Researcher Hub](#).
- For PeopleXD-related queries, please see the [project page](#) or contact the project team: researchercareerpathwayproject@it.ox.ac.uk.

ALL:

- For helpful Charter-related resources, please see the [Researcher Hub](#) website or Concordat & Charter for the Career Development of Researchers [Sharepoint page](#) (where resources will be added over time).

- Please email researcherhub@admin.ox.ac.uk for any researcher-related questions, general queries or to organise a meeting / drop-in session.
 - Drop-in session run in person or online every Thursday from 3:00 – 4:30 pm.
 - Address: People and Organisational Development, Littlegate House, 16/17 St Ebbe's, Oxford OX1 3PT
 - The Researcher Hub works in collaboration with [divisional Research Culture Facilitators](#).
 - To access this document online, please use the QR code below.
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