# Professional Development for Research Staff: Information for MSD departments

## Background

The University of Oxford and the Medical Sciences Division has committed to “*Provide opportunities, structured support, encouragement and time for researchers to engage in a* ***minimum of 10 days professional development pro rata per year***”.

This commitment stems from the ‘Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers’ and is included in the University’s [Concordat Action Plan](https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/concordat-action-plan/time-for-professional-development). It is also supported by funders, including Wellcome and UKRI, with an expectation that principal investigators and institutions will be able to evidence how they support the career development of researchers.

The Division would like to ensure that researchers undertake continuing professional development (CPD) in line with this commitment. This paper introduces some of the principles, expectations and pathways available to departments and PIs, as we continue to explore approaches for effective implementation.

## What is professional development?

Professional development for researchers takes many forms, encompassing any activities that enhance professional competencies or enable them to gain experiences that contribute to their current role or future career (which may be outside academia). It is important to consider the diversity of opportunities, as much professional development activity that is already happening may not be recognised as such. Such opportunities may arise within a research group, department, university, or elsewhere. A [**new webpage**](https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/researcher-hub/professional-development-researchers) is available to support planning of researchers’ professional development.

Some examples of professional development for research staff include:

* Attending training, workshops, and courses;
* Contributing to a working group or committee;
* Taking on a leadership or supervision role;
* Organising seminars or events;
* Speaking at a conference;
* Working on a funding application;
* Learning from others through mentoring or networking events, or the [Careers Service](https://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/advice-appointments/#collapse2060831).

Further useful links are provided in the [Researchers’ Toolkit](https://www.medsci.ox.ac.uk/research/researchers-toolkit) and by the [Researcher Hub](https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/researcher-hub/personal-professional-development).

## Principles

### Encourage professional development

* Ensure that researchers are aware of their entitlement to a minimum of 10 days of CPD per year (pro rata).
* Ensure that PIs, research leaders and managers proactively encourage research staff to engage with CPD.
* Ensure that PIs, research leaders and managers are aware of their department’s commitments to CPD, in line with the University’s Concordat Action Plan.
* Use departmental communications to promote engagement with CPD. This should, at minimum, be included on the department website, in induction material, and annual review guidance documents.

### Recognise the breadth and importance of researcher development

* Take a broad and inclusive view on professional development, with the awareness that researchers may have different career trajectories and destinations.
* Recognise and reward the work of department members (e.g. PIs) who support the development of others (consistent with narrative CV formats, such as the [R4RI](https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/before-you-apply/resume-for-research-and-innovation-r4ri-guidance/)).
* Support and raise awareness of the work of the departmental [Research Staff Representative and Advocate for Research Staff](https://www.medsci.ox.ac.uk/about-us/who-we-are/committees/research-staff-forum).

## Processes to support professional development

* **Agreement with the line manager:** Ensure that researchers have a straightforward mechanism to agree participation in professional development with their line manager. It is good practice for there to be a person or group (other than the line manager) with whom a researcher can raise questions about professional development, if required (for example, via a departmental career development committee or an advisor).
* **Annual reviews:** Encourage all researchers to participate in departmental annual professional/career development review process, to a) record and review their development in the past year; and b) identify the skills they want to develop and professional development activities they want to undertake in the forthcoming year.
* **Departmental records:** for funder audits and REF, departments may need to provide evidence (a) that all researchers have access to CPD and are supported in their professional development; (b) of how information about CPD is communicated to researchers; (c) how much time researchers are spending on CPD. Some departments are piloting the use of TeamSeer to record CPD.
* **Funding:** Within the broad definition of CPD there are many activities of zero/low cost and the University and Division provide many free courses and workshops that can benefit researchers. Therefore, although there are currently no University or Divisional funds directly allocated to support individual CPD activities, the lack of dedicated funding should not be seen as a reason not to encourage 10 days CPD per year.