# Terms of reference for MPLS RSF & appointment of Co-Chairs

Terms of Reference

MPLS RSF was set up in 2016.

* It aims to represent the needs of research staff at a divisional level
* It is a committee that meets termly
* It discusses issues raised from a departmental level
* It contributes to debates on institutional and external research staff initiatives such as: eligibility to training, or the drafts of the Concordat.
* It makes policy proposals to the Research Staff Consultative Group, MPLS ECR Forum and Divisional Board
* It shares good practice in establishing and running research staff societies at a departmental level.
* It acts as a conduit of information from division to research staff in departments.

The committee aims to have at least one research staff representative from each department in the division. One of the co- chairs of MPLS RSF sits on Divisional Board, the governing body of the division. The other co-chair sits on the MPLS Training and Development Steering Group. Both co-chairs sit on the Research Staff Consultative Group of the University. Issues discussed at meetings of MPLS RSF can then be raised at divisional and institutional levels. The Researcher Training and Development Manager supports MPLS RSS by acting as a secretary to the committee, providing continuity, induction for new members and giving briefings on specific subjects. Two representatives from MPLS RSF (usually the co-chairs) sit on the MPLS ECR Forum.

Background

The University Advocate for Research Staff (henceforth ‘Advocate’) has proposed an approach for better representation and consideration of the issues relating to research staff involving the creation of three committees that meet termly, which has been approved by both the Research and Innovation Committee (RIC) and Personnel Committee (PC). It is intended that this approach will result in a uniform approach for considering research staff issues across the Collegiate University, and that activities will be reported to both RIC and PC.

**The Research Staff Steering Committee (RSSC)** has responsibility for agreeing and coordinating strategy and planning to drive the agenda on enhancing opportunities for research staff. It includes academic representatives from each of the four divisions and from the Conference of Colleges (the College Advocate), directors of each of the key central service departments, and the chairs of the two other committees.

**The Research Staff Working Group (RSWG)** is an executive group responsible for leadership, management and implementation of research staff initiatives.

**The Research Staff Consultation Group (RSCG)** provides a forum for research staff to identify and prioritise themes and measures, which will advise and inform the strategy, initiatives and priorities of RSWG and RSSC.

At the divisional level MPLS has the Early Career Research Forum (ECRF) comprised of the Divisional Associate Head for People, the two co-chairs of MPLS Research Staff Forum (MPLS RSF) and advocates (permanent academic staff) from each department supported by MPLS administration staff most notably the Research Staff Development Manager. To make these new posts as representative and transparent as possible to the division the following selection process has been agreed

Selection process principles

* Research staff should have oversight and control of selecting their representatives and should be involved in each stage of the selection process.
* A clear and transparent selection process is co-created between divisional research staff and key divisional staff members who support research staff.
* The selection process follow the University’s policies on Equality and Diversity (https://edu.ox.ac.uk/equality-policy). Research staff are not only the largest staff group at the University, but also the most diverse group. Applications from research staff from under-represented groups should be strongly encouraged.
* A process that allows any member of research staff to be selected irrespective of time at Oxford, stage of career, or length of contract, given that there should be the likelihood of their being a member of research staff at Oxford for the academic year.
* The process is communicated as widely as possible to all research staff using a number of communication channels e.g. webpages, email lists.
* Selected Fellows should have legitimacy as true ‘representatives’ whose voices are heard.

Eligibility

To be eligible for nomination as a research staff representation or to be eligible to vote for a representative, University policy is to align with the definition of ‘researcher’ as stated in The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (Sept, 2019). Where the Concordat allows for flexibility, the relevant faculty/department shall determine whether individual circumstances shall be deemed to meet the criteria. The Concordat states:

Researchers are defined as individuals whose primary responsibility is to conduct research and who are employed specifically for this purpose by a higher education institution or research institute. Within this group, it is recognised that these staff often have different contract types, levels of training, experience and responsibility, as well as different career expectations and intentions. Disciplinary and institutional context can also mean a broad range of job titles fall within this definition.

There are many other groups of individuals who actively engage in research within institutions and who would be expected to develop their research identity as part of their career progression, including postgraduate researchers, staff on teaching and research or teaching-only contracts, clinicians, professional support staff and technicians. However, whilst we encourage institutions to apply the benefits of the Concordat to as many of these groups as is feasible, the primary audience for this Concordat remains research staff.

## Workflow for selection

* Advertise role along with the representative structure through both bottom up and top down communication. This will utilise the network developed by the ECRF direct to research staff while gaining legitimacy from departments/division with the aim of reaching the majority of eligible people.
* Candidates should have a proposer and a seconder who are current researchers (as defined above). Each candidate will be asked for a short statement of interest (SOI 200-300 words) with any past committee or representative experience. These will be public.
* The candidates will be asked to respond in writing to 3-4 additional open questions set by the election administrators (current MPLS RSS co-chairs and the Researcher Training and Development Manager) to help the voters see candidate’s position on key issues which will be relevant in the following 12 months.
* The SOIs and question responses will be made available to all and the election is to be held online using a secure system. Irrelevant of the number of candidates a Reopen Nominations should be an option on the ballot, and the percentage of voters recorded.

In the unfortunate event that the election administrators finds less than three suitable candidates apply before the election the departmental advocates will be approached to nominate/actively encourage application of staff members known to them as capable. This could also be a route used if the diversity of the current applicants is seen to not be truly representative of the research staff population.

Short-term measures

The above election process will take some time to establish, therefore for 2021 the following procedure shall be enacted:

* the selection should be made from current members of the MPLS RSS Committee;
* each candidate for co-chair should have a proposer and seconder;
* if there are only two candidates, they will be selected by default;
* if there are more than two candidates, there will be a secret ballot and the candidates who come first and second will be selected;
* the secretary to the MPLS RSS Committee will act as returning officer.

Once the new system of elections has been established, if either of the co-chair’s posts become vacant during their year of office, it is proposed that the latter method of selection is used to fill their position.

*Passed at MPLS RSF Michaelmas Term 2020, amended Trinity Term 2022*