

Guidelines for the Selection of Research Staff Representatives May 2020 (Updated May 2021)	RSSC(20) 12.2
---	------------------------------------

Background

A new central representational structure for research staff has been introduced to embed the consideration of the career and professional development of research staff within the decision making structure of the Collegiate University. The structure seeks to procure a uniform approach across the Collegiate University and builds on existing representative groups.

The Research Staff Steering Committee (RSSC), chaired by the University Advocate for Research Staff, has been convened on behalf of Research & Innovation Committee to provide the strategic direction of the University to enhance the opportunities and support for research staff, in accordance with Priority 8 of the University's Strategic Plan 2018-23. RSSC is a decision-making group made up of senior representatives from academic divisions, the colleges, key professional services, and research staff. RSSC will work in collaboration with the newly formed Research Staff Consultative Group (RSCG) and the existing Research Staff Working Group (RSWG) to implement the University's response to the 2019 Concordat on Research Staff Development.

Selection of Research Staff Representatives

A key principle embedded within the revised structure is that research staff should have oversight and control of selecting their representatives. The primary goal is to ensure that across the Collegiate University there is a representative structure that facilitates a two-way flow of information which provides a mechanism by which all research staff have a voice in all decisions that are specific to this group. To realise this, a 'bottom-up' structure of research staff representation will be the foundation of the new structure.

[The representative structure described below mirrors the structure which has successfully incorporated the views of the University's 6000 D.Phil students into the University's decision making structure (through the departmental and divisional joint consultative forums, and through representation on Divisional Boards and at Research Degrees Panel). Since the number of Research Staff is similar (~ 5000), a similar proposed approach is appropriate.]

Representation within Faculties/Departments and Divisions

The process for selecting representatives is likely to differ between divisions, departments, faculties, and colleges, based on the numbers of research staff and the culture of different research areas. Where operational and effective, processes for selection should build on existing fora. Where no representational structure currently exists, or existing fora or processes are to be revisited, the following structure and accompanying processes are suggested.

Faculty/Department Representation

Faculties/departments¹ are encouraged to introduce a process for nomination of a '**Department Researcher Representative**'. Each faculty/department should uphold a transparent selection processes to enable connectedness of research staff representation throughout the University. The suggested process is outlined below:

1. The faculty/department invites expressions of interest (EOIs) from research staff for the position of Department Research Staff Representative. The window should be open for 2-3 weeks.
2. EOIs should be limited in length (one page maximum) and outline:
 - a. The experience that the candidate will bring to the position.
 - b. The aspirations of the candidate for research staff initiatives within the faculty /department, including how these are to be realised.
 - c. The aspirations of the candidate for research staff initiatives within the respective division, including an outline plan on how they might come to fruition.
 - d. EOIs should have the confirmed support of one other research staff member within the department (a 'seconder') and be subject to approval of the Head of Department / Chair of Faculty.²
3. EOIs which meet the requirements should be shared with all research staff within the relevant faculty/division and be the subject of a confidential ballot.
4. The successful candidate is appointed for one year.
5. Guidance on eligibility for the nomination and voting is given below.

Best practice suggests that the initial term of each faculty / department representative on the divisional forum should be for one academic year, with the incumbent member being able to self-nominate for reselection the following year. The maximum term on the divisional forum for each representative should usually be two years.

Faculties/departments are also encouraged to introduce a process for the appointment of a '**Department Research Staff Advocate**'. Such positions will usually be held by a permanent member of academic staff with a particular affiliation with and experience in supporting research staff. The role will entail championing the needs of research staff within the faculty / department, facilitating the initiatives proposed by the Department Researcher Representative, as agreed by the faculty/department research staff forum (see below). The Department Research Staff Advocate will have oversight of the welfare needs of research staff with a view to signposting staff to existing support and highlighting unmet needs to relevant service providers. The appointment process for the Department Academic Research Representative is at the discretion of each faculty/department.

¹ Note that it is the responsibility of the Department/Faculty that a process of nomination and selection *takes place*, but oversight and control of the selection process rests with the research staff in that Department/Faculty.

² Department/Faculty approval will provide legitimacy and credibility to the Department Researcher Representative; it will encourage engagement by ensuring that the department is aware of the process; and also provide an opportunity to check that the applicant is eligible for the role.

Faculty / Department Forum

Representation: For faculty/departments with a sufficiently large number of research staff, a representative forum should be established which will be co-chaired by the Department Research Staff Representative and Department Research Staff Advocate. The Forum will report to and be consulted by the appropriate departmental committee(s) (research committee or equivalent). The Department Research Staff Representative should also be invited to join the relevant committee(s). For faculties/departments with small numbers of research staff a joint forum across several cognate faculties/departments may be created.

Networking: Current best practice in supporting these forums provides administrative support and a small annual budget to allow research staff to (self-) organise networking, career and professional development activities.

Divisional Representation and Forum

Representation: The Department Research Staff Representatives and Department Research Staff Advocates for each faculty/departmental will together form a **Divisional Research Staff Forum**. The Forum will be co-chaired by the Divisional Research Staff Advocate. Collectively the Faculty / Department Research Staff Representatives will nominate two of their number to represent research staff in the following roles:

1. Co-chair of the Divisional Research Staff Forum.
2. Research staff representative on the Divisional Board.

These two research staff representatives shall be the Divisional Research Staff Representatives on the University level Research Staff Consultation Group and shall be awarded the **University Research Staff Representation Fellowships** in recognition of their support of the research staff community (further details are given below).

Networking: Divisions may elect to provide administrative support and a small annual budget to allow research staff to (self-) organise interdisciplinary networking, career and professional development activities.

College-only Researchers

The colleges, via the RSSC and Senior Tutors Committee, will introduce a process, based on that outlined above for Divisions, to elect two college-only research representatives to the Research Staff Consultation Group.

Oxford Research Staff Society (OxRSS)

OxRSS will select two OxRSS representatives to the Research Staff Consultation Group. The nomination and selection process will be the responsibility of the OxRSS Committee. The process will be transparent and will may draw on that suggested for department / faculty representatives outlined above. Best practice suggests that the initial term of each OxRSS representative on RSCG should be for one academic year, with the incumbent member being able to self-nominate for reselection the following year. The maximum term on RSCG for each OxRSS representative should usually be two years.

Research Staff Consultation Group (RSCG)

The RSCG is a forum for research staff to identify and prioritise themes and measures which will advise and inform the strategy, initiatives and priorities of the RSSC and the work of the RSWG.

Specifically, the purpose and role of RSCG is to:

- Provide a focus for effective communication within and across the research staff community, seeking out and bringing to the group perspectives, priorities, insight and issues from research staff across the Collegiate University.
- To identify and prioritize initiatives, and work with RSWG in identifying priority themes and corresponding actions.
- Encourage two-way communication regarding RSSC and RSWG activity with the research community more broadly.
- Augment the work of the OxRSS and to promote the interests of research staff within the Collegiate University.
- Work with RSSC, divisions, and faculties/departments to coordinate the representation of research staff on key University, divisional, faculty/departmental, and Conference of Colleges committees so that views expressed in those committees are representative of the views of the research staff community as a whole.

Membership of RSCG

The RSCG membership will be made up of twelve **University Research Staff Representational Fellows**, two from each of the four academic divisions, two members of research staff from the colleges, and two members nominated by OxRSS. The Fellows will be offered £2000 per annum towards professional development expenses (conference attendance, training, networking etc.) and are expected to dedicate approximately ten days per annum to the role which will involve attendance at appropriate committees; liaison with other research staff; and two-way information flow within their respective divisions, faculty/ departments, colleges, and OxRSS Committee.

Chair and Co-Chair of RSCG

In MT of each year, RSCG members will nominate and select from their number the RSCG Chair and Co-Chair for the following academic year. The selection process is

- a. Members with an interest in either or both roles will self-nominate via email to the Secretary of RSCG
- b. A Special RSCG meeting will be convened and each candidate will outline their proposed research staff initiatives to be led by RSCG, including how these are to be realised.
- c. All members of RSCG will be entitled to vote for their preferred candidate for each position, Chair and Co-Chair. Voting will be anonymous.

While membership of RSCG is a pre-requisite at the time of self-nomination to the position of Chair / Co-Chair of RSCG, representation on divisional/college/OxRSS fora in the same academic year as holding the role of Chair / Co-Chair of RSCG is not a requirement. For the avoidance of doubt, candidates *may* be divisional/college/OxRSS representatives in the same year as being the Chair / Co-Chair of RSCG, but this is not a requirement of either RSCG position.

Representation on other University-wide Committees and Groups

Outside of the formal structure described above, research staff provide representation across a number of committees and working groups. The RSCG will seek to secure research staff representation on further relevant University committees and working groups. Vacancies for research staff representatives on university-wide committees and working groups will be brought to the attention of the Divisional Research Staff Fora, for cascading to their respective faculty/department research staff fora. Research staff with an interest in the role will self-nominate via these groups. The EOI process described above (under Faculty / Department Representatives is suggested). Where multiple expressions of interest are received, these will be considered by the RSCG, who will be responsible for selection of research staff representative on other University-wide committees and groups.

Research staff who attend a university-wide committee or working group shall be invited periodically to report to the RSCG and Divisional Research Staff Forum, to provide feedback of non-confidential information which is particularly relevant to research staff and to canvas the view of RSCG members. In the longer term, it is also envisaged that the Research Staff website will be used to further disseminate such news.

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 meeting 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.

OxRSS Voice Representatives

The revised process builds on the exemplary work of OxRSS who have pioneered the representational role of researchers at Oxford. The structure outlined in this guidance will supersede the process followed until TT2020, where researchers volunteered to become OxRSS Voice Representatives and membership of the RSSC has, through necessity, been limited to the pool of OxRSS Voice Representatives. It is due to the work of OxRSS Voice Representatives that the University has fully recognised the need for research staff representation to be brought within the formal decision making structures of the University, where the role of research representatives within departments, divisions, and centrally via the RSSC, is formally acknowledged and supported.

RSSC remains committed to OxRSS and will support and liaise with members in their future endeavours. RSSC will continue to seek internal funds to underpin and strengthen the events activities of the Society, and would welcome proposals from RSCG on how the links between the events activities of the Society and the representational structure will be cultivated and consolidated. Department Researcher Representatives are encouraged to be a conduit through which OxRSS activity is brought to the attention of researchers and department networks may wish to invite wider participation in relevant events via OxRSS.