

Oxford Research Staff Society (OxRSS)

2023-24 Year in Review

Claudio Cortes Rodriguez & Jennifer Allen

Co-Chairs



As the year comes to a close, we are reflecting back on the breadth and depth of events that we (as in the Committee, our priceless volunteers/hosts and all OxRSS members) have put forward this year, and we are very proud and excited to recap them in the following pages. We will try to go through all events and any omission should only be blamed on our memories, OxRSS thrives on the involvement of its members and this is one of our biggest assets as we all work together to improve the experience of Research Staff in the University.

Promoting OxRSS

Building up on the previous committees' work, we've continued to focus on promoting the Research Staff Society to wider audiences. We appreciate the great benefits that the Society has for those who engage with it, and we continue to reach out to the proportion of Research Staff that do not engage with us. While word of mouth has been and remains a key driver for visibility, we have actively engaged several channels and taken initiatives such as:

■ Welcome Events & Information Events

The Committee, along with some other volunteers, have attended a range of welcome events and information events for research staff to present to them about the Oxford Research Staff Society. Of all the actions that we do to promote the Society, we find that these welcome events tend to result in the most engagement (both at the event itself and afterwards). We thank everyone who has given their time to represent OxRSS at these events – it makes a massive difference and we value your effort.



■ Promotional Items



After the great success of the OxRSS-branded collapsible mugs, this year we've decided to express our brand through a more tech-focused item: power banks! We're quite happy with them because they can be extremely useful on a daily-basis, and we think they continue the now-tradition of useful item that can spark conversations about OxRSS.

There are still several left and they tend to make appearances at OxRSS events, so keep your eyes peeled!

As part of our ongoing commitment to welfare and sports, we have once again contributed OxRSS-branded T-shirts for a group of research staff from the Society who ran the Oxford Town and Gown. Seeing the logo being sported throughout the city was a great way to increase visibility for OxRSS and helped runners stay cooler.

If you have other ideas for how to promote the Society, please do let us know, or get involved yourself!



■ Website

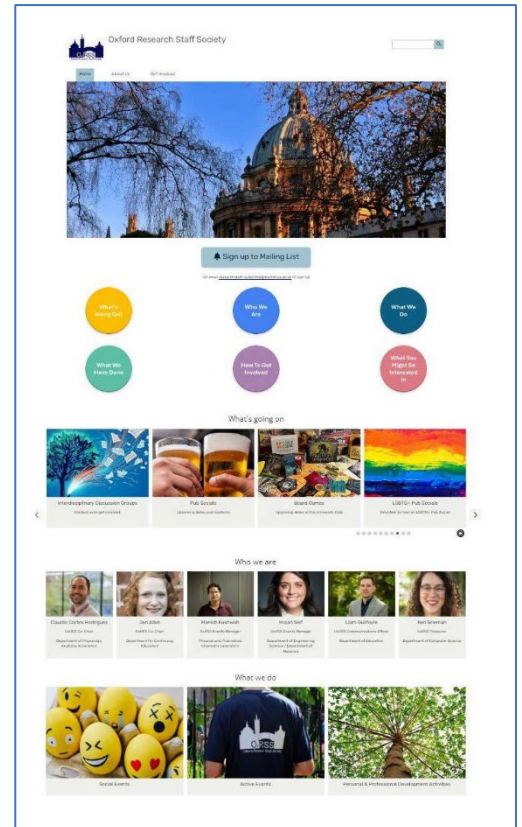
The idea of revitalising the website has been on the agenda for the Committee since last year. As a voluntary organisation it has taken us some time to get this off the ground, but we have been working hard over the course of this year to do so. The website is now created, populated, and ready to launch very soon! Maybe even by the time you read this.

■ Gazette

The University of Oxford Gazette is the publication which goes to every member of the University on a regular basis. After a hiatus during the pandemic, we've resumed posting advertisements in it to widen the visibility of the Research Staff Society across the University.

■ Research Staff Representatives

Similarly, research staff representatives have the capacity to cascade information through their respective representative bodies (such as postdoc associations or research staff fora in their divisions and departments). We have circulated information, including our poster, to research staff representatives for cascading. We are also happy to confirm that conversations with HR have led to OxRSS being included in new Research Staff's starter packs. If you have new arrivals around you, send them the OxRSS way and we'll make sure they have access to our events and community.



■ Poster

We also revitalised the poster for the Research Staff Society, to include QR codes to sign up to the mailing list and visit our website, as well as providing a more overall visually appealing appearance. You might've seen one of these around your Department/Institute or at welcome events. If not, we can provide one for you to put up to help us spread the word!

Supporting Research Staff Ideas & Generating New Events

OxRSS has a huge capacity to grow, develop, and serve the research staff body as long as it has the commitment and energy of its volunteers, and a willingness to be responsive to the needs and desires of its members. This is not just our ideal but also our experience. This year, the Committee and the event hosts have shown just how much we can accomplish when we capitalise on the volunteerism and the innovative ideas brought forward by research staff. When someone comes forward with an idea, we welcome it and try to facilitate it both financially and logistically, but we also need their help to get it off the ground and continually hosted.

■ Town & Gown Run

One idea which emerged last year from members was the possibility of running the Oxford Town and Gown 10K charity run as an OxRSS group. The Committee decided to sponsor the team (subsidising the entry fee) and providing an OxRSS-branded T-shirt. This achieved a number of objectives at once – providing research staff with another active social offering, supporting local charities, and promoting OxRSS in the Oxford community. We've now continued that commitment, supporting 17 of our members to run the Town & Gown!



■ No-Alcohol Socials

While our pub socials are a popular event in the OxRSS calendar, some members have expressed a desire for a social event without alcohol. We have trialled these in the past year and have found that they do offer a very positive experience for people that might not wish to involve in alcohol-prone environments. With this in mind, we're now perusing the idea by actively looking at hosts and options to be able to offer these events as soon as possible.

■ Tours

OxRSS has privately booked and subsidised a range of tours of Oxford, provided by social enterprise "Uncomfortable Oxford". These tours not only present another opportunity for researchers to gather and engage with each other, but also teach us about a lesser-known side of the city that we live in, and support a local organisation providing educational experiences. Specifically, this year we subsidised tours of the Botanic Gardens, the University Church/Tower and an LGBTQIA+ focused tour.

■ Generating New Events

In addition to the events above, a range of other activities have begun or are currently in the process of being facilitated. For example, groups of researchers are meeting on a regular basis to engage together in park runs, hold a book club, and meet for photography sessions after a social coffee. So, if you have any ideas that you'd like to put in practice, just contact anyone in the Committee to get the conversation started.

Some of the new events that our very social Event Managers delivered this year include Blenheim Palace Xmas Light trail, a Whisky tasting for Burns night, Wine and Cheese tasting, Junkyard golf, and Sixes.



This is all in addition to the regular offerings of pub socials, board games nights, and special occasions like college dinners. The 2023-2024 events listing shows a complete picture of the opportunities provided this academic year. It is a triumph and a testament to the breadth of the Society that an entirely voluntary group can even attempt to offer such an array of activities. Bravo!

Advocating for Research Staff

The representative aspect of OxRSS has changed since 2021: that year, the research staff representation structure of 'Voice Reps' that had been successfully run by OxRSS was recognised and absorbed into the Divisions, who are now running the network effectively. The Society still maintains some key representative functions. This includes OxRSS participation in the representation network through service on the Research Staff Consultation Group, and additional advocacy for the needs of research staff and for support for the Society's work.

■ Research Staff Consultation Group



OxRSS has two seats on the Research Staff Consultation Group ([RSCG](#)). This affords OxRSS the opportunity to be informed about, and involved in, important conversations about research staff at a University level. The range of events that OxRSS runs allows us as a society to be connected to a wide range of research staff across the University. Many needs and concerns emerge through conversations at OxRSS social and professional events, so we are in a useful position to contribute and to raise issues. This year, the RSCG seats were filled by the two co-chairs, who were active and engaged members of the RSCG, attending and contributing to each meeting (twice per term). The topics that have been discussed this year include (but are not limited to) visa fees, open-ended contracts, alumni access to facilities, paternity cover, with a big emphasis on the Pay & Living Condition review. The distilled points that came out of these discussions have been put together in a white paper that was shared with the Pay & Living Conditions committee itself.

■ Consultation and Working Group Engagement for the University Club

OxRSS has engaged with a consultant hired to review the use and function of the University Club. The Club originally functioned to serve, among others, research staff without college affiliation, but since COVID-19 had remained closed until very recently. In these meetings, we have provided feedback on the needs of research staff with respect to the University Club and wider facilities, and how OxRSS might make use of facilities if they were available. Beyond this, OxRSS (via Jennifer Allen) is participating in the ongoing work of the Working Group for review of the University Club.

Relationships with the Researcher Hub and Newcomers' Club



■ Working with the Researcher Hub and funding support

OxRSS has frequent communications and catch-up meetings with the [Researcher Hub](#) to share information and mutually support each other. The Committee firmly believes that we can achieve much through working together and finding synergies. The OxRSS Administrative Officer works from the Hub, attends Hub team meetings, and liaises and shares relevant information between the two groups.

We are very grateful for the support of the Researcher Hub which, in seeking funding for its activities and for supporting research staff more broadly, have included OxRSS in their funding bids. As a result, since the Hub's inception, OxRSS has had continuous funding for events and its Administrative Officer's salary from the John Fell Fund and, recently, Research England. This has helped us cement OxRSS' standing and look forward to further growth as the research staff population also grows.



■ Working with the Oxford University Newcomers' Club

In the same vein, OxRSS has liaised and worked with the Oxford University Newcomers' Club ([OUNC](#)) to identify potential synergies, from advertising events where the societies welcome one another's members (e.g., OUNC's singing group, coffee mornings, and toddlers' group) to co-hosting events such as the international picnic held in 2023. The OxRSS Administrative Officer meets weekly with the OUNC Administrative Officer.

Relationships and Interactions with Colleges

We recognise how much college life plays a role in what it means to be in Oxford, and yet the vast majority of research staff in the University have no college affiliation. The Research Staff Society has therefore sought to bring researchers into closer contact with colleges and to advocate for increased affiliations for research staff from colleges. Besides many ongoing discussions regarding what shape and form these affiliations might take, we have engaged in the following:

■ Events in Colleges

We have hosted more events in colleges, from college dinners to Interdisciplinary Discussion Forums. We will continue to search for opportunities to bring research staff in closer contact with college life – to provide that experience, but also to show colleges the value and vitality that research staff can add to their communities. If you have a College Affiliation and would like to host an event, please get in touch.

■ Circulating College Affiliation Opportunities

Where opportunities have become available, we have sought to advertise these in our email circulations so more research staff become aware. This supplements the live webpage hosted by the Researcher Hub: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/researcher-hub/non-stipendiary-college-associations-research-staff>

Continuing a Relationship with Our Alumni

Finally, this year we have sought to explore the ways that we might stay in touch with research staff who have been a part of OxRSS in the past, but have moved on from the University, or indeed those who stay in the University but move to different roles. The Committee has therefore generated the concept of Alumni Membership, which we will begin to roll out, pending discussions at the AGM.

The proposal is that members who sign up as Alumni, whether they remain at the University or leave, will be able to continue to receive event notifications and attend OxRSS events; and, if they remain (in any staff roll), they are welcome to continue to engage as volunteers in the Society.

Thank You

We want to finish our account of this year with a massive thank you to all of our event hosts and other volunteers who have given their time to make OxRSS a success. Without you, OxRSS would not function and we are so very grateful for your service and support. We hope you continue to support OxRSS in the future.