Oxford Research Staff Society (OxRSS) 2024-25 Year in Review

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Co-Chairs

As we come together preparing for the academic year ahead, the OxRSS Co-Chairs would like to share what has kept us all busy in 2024-25. Before getting into details, we would like to acknowledge and celebrate the engagement of OxRSS volunteers and members, without whom none of this would be possible. Thank you for making a difference! Please read on for the year's highlights.

Promoting OxRSS

Since OxRSS is built on a 'by researchers, for researchers' model, increasing visibility and making everyone aware of what we can offer to improve their Oxford experience remains a cornerstone of our work. Through a mix of University-wide and Divisional welcome events, we are reaching more new arrivals than ever, and we have updated our website and launched our Instagram account.

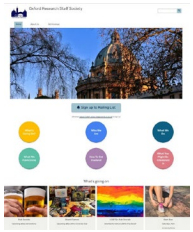
□ Welcome Events

OxRSS has proved year after year to be an important contribution to welcome events, complementing the many professional support channels that research staff have available to them. These events normally reach 15-40 participants, either online or in-person, and we will continue our involvement in 2025-26.

□ Promotional Merchandise

After the great success of the OxRSS-branded collapsible mugs and power banks, this year we decided to take a different approach and made OxRSS merch in the form of baseball caps - they have been very successful and make identifying hosts or members at events much easier!

□ OxRSS Website



At the AGM last year, we announced the launch of our new website. Work on the site continued this year, with improvements and additions. We are very excited to now have an eye-catching and informative website containing the material that our members request the most.

□ OxRSS Instagram

We have opened an Instagram account, which gives the Society a more personalised tone and voice, while also expanding our reach. Many of the events are advertised through emails and socials, which seem to be complementing each other nicely. Follow us at **@oxrss_official**

If you have other ideas for how to promote OxRSS, please let us know – and you are welcome to get involved yourself!

Events for Researchers

This year, we have taken up many of the interests of our members towards developing new events. We endeavour to offer what our members want by maintaining open channels of communication with the Committee.

□ Sports

OxRSS has supported numerous sports activities this year. The Committee decided to sponsor financially the long-running squash meetups (Saturday mornings at Iffley Road Sports Centre), paying for court hire and buying equipment to lower the barrier for participation. Events Manager Mujan Seif took the lead on organising sports sessions (badminton, frisbee, etc) in University Parks – the newly purchased equipment will hopefully be utilised for years to come! Sports combine mental and physical wellbeing, so it is rewarding to receive the levels of engagement we've seen this year.

□ Non-Alcohol Socials

Last year, we set out to host more events that were attractive to people not wishing to partake in alcohol, and this year we hosted chai/coffee meetups, as well as some very successful afternoon teas. We are looking for volunteers interested in co-hosting such events in the future – please do get in touch.

□ Tours

OxRSS has subsidised a range of private tours. These tours not only present opportunities for researchers to gather and engage with each other, but also teach us something new about our city. New tours included Oxford Castle & Prison, while we returned to our old favourite Uncomfortable Oxford, a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to diversifying local history and one we're glad to continue to support.

□ International Picnic

OxRSS's international picnic is a celebration of the diversity and goodwill of our members, where we come together to share a meal and an afternoon of fun. Held in University Parks this year, it attracted many members, including friends and family. People either brought something to share or just brought themselves, spending a relaxing afternoon of socialising on the grass.

□ Linacre Drinks

One of the most frequent requests we hear from members relates to access to colleges. While we can highlight membership and associate opportunities only as they come along,

we continue to strive to offer part of the college experience to research staff. While events at colleges can be prohibitively expensive, this year we were delighted to hold two affordable drinks evenings at the Linacre College bar. These proved to be incredibly popular – many members were able to enjoy an evening at one of the most welcoming college bars in town!

□ Encouraging New Ideas

If you have any ideas, suggestions or comments, please contact us at the Committee email address: **committee@oxrss.ox.ac.uk**. We read and reply to all emails that arrive. We are aiming to increase our host numbers, so events can be co-hosted and our volunteers feel confident and well-supported.

The 2024-25 events listing paints a very positive picture of the opportunities provided this past academic year. The sheer number of events and participants is incredible (~120 events & approaching 2,000 attendees!), and again, this is only possible because of the hard work and dedication of the hosts and volunteers.

Advocating for Research Staff

The representative aspect of OxRSS has changed since 2021, when the research staff representation structure of 'Voice Reps' that had been successfully run by OxRSS was recognised and absorbed into the Divisions. While this new structure operates effectively, OxRSS maintains some key representative functions. This includes two seats on the Research Staff Consultation Group (**RSCG**), which meets twice per term, and additional advocacy for the needs of research staff and for support for the Society's work.

□ Research Staff Consultation Group

Our seats on the RSCG enables us to be kept up-to-date and involved in important discussions about research staff at a University level. Many needs and concerns of our members emerge through conversations at OxRSS social and professional events, so we are well-positioned to raise issues and contribute to discussions. The two OxRSS Co-Chairs were active and engaged at and between RSCG meetings. Topics this year centred on the Pay & Conditions Report recommendations, including employment precarity, access to facilities, parental leave and career progression pathways. The RSCG will continue to push for improvement in these and many other areas in the coming academic year, and OxRSS will continue to be part of that.

□ University Club Working Group

OxRSS has a seat on the University Club Working Group, which continues to review the use and function of the Club into 2025-26. The Club originally functioned to serve, among others, research staff without college affiliation; but over time, this has waned for many reasons, not least the COVID-19 pandemic. We advocate for the needs of research staff with respect to the University Club and wider facilities, and our Board Games Nights have taken place there on alternate Tuesday evenings for some time now. Let us know if you have any thoughts or ideas for making use of or improving the Club!

Relationship with the Researcher Hub

OxRSS has had regular communications and catch-up meetings with the Researcher Hub to share information and maintain mutual support. The OxRSS Administrative Officer was based in the Hub and attended Hub team meetings, liaising and sharing pertinent information. The Committee firmly believes that we can achieve much through working together and finding synergies across the University, which we continue to strive to do.

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the support of each Researcher Hub team member over the past three years and the finances covering both the OxRSS Administrator role and funding for us to subsidise events. With the restructuring of the Hub for the end of the fixed-term funding cycle in July, we had to fight to keep our Administrator in post at the University, thereby keeping OxRSS administrative support in place. Without this, we would be unable to provide for our members all that we have done in recent years. In 2025-26, it will be crucial for the incoming Committee to convince the University to make this role permanent, to ensure ongoing support for researchers in the years to come.

Interactions with Colleges

We appreciate the role a college can play at Oxford, but it is worth remembering that the vast majority of research staff do not have a college affiliation. There are longstanding discussions about increasing such affiliations, but in the meantime OxRSS has sought to bring researchers into closer contact with colleges.

□ Events in Colleges

When we can, we host events in colleges, including college dinners, drinks evenings, non-alcohol socials, Interdisciplinary Discussion Forums and, this year, our AGM. Without events funding for 2025-26, we will struggle to hold as many college events as we have done in recent years, but we will continue to search for opportunities to bring researchers into colleges. We hope that by doing so we help to demonstrate the value and vitality that research staff add to their communities. If you have a college affiliation and would be able to help host an event, please do get in touch.

□ College Affiliation Opportunities

When college affiliation opportunities are advertised, we have sought to include these in our email circulations to supplement the live webpage hosted by the Researcher Hub: https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/researcher-hub/non-stipendiary-college-associations-research-staff

Relationships with our Alumni

This year we have made plans to implement a process for staying in touch with research staff who were OxRSS members and have moved on from the University. The Committee has created an OxRSS Alumni Membership, which we will shortly roll out.

Members who sign up as OxRSS Alumni will be able to continue to receive our email circulations and attend OxRSS events; those who remain at Oxford in a non-research role can additionally 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, as well

as our dedicated Administrative Officer. Without all of you, OxRSS would simply not function, and we are so very grateful for whatever input you have had. We hope you continue to support OxRSS in the future.