## Career Development Review Conversations:

## Guidance Note for Fixed-Term Researchers

All fixed-term researchers are expected to engage positively in an annual review with their PI / line manager or another senior colleague in the University. This guidance focuses on Career Development Reviews (CDR). A career development review (CDR) is a structured and confidential conversation about your career development.  The focus of a CDR conversation is on supporting your career planning and exploring personal career aspirations in *any* sector or in *any* role.  The conversation should identify career goals, opportunities to improve career prospects, routes to further career development and related skills and professional development or training objectives.

Personnel Committee agreed in February 2022 that a stepped approach will be taken towards an institution-wide target that all fixed term researchers will be offered annual CDR conversation by 2025. Each department/faculty will establish a scheme relevant to their staff that aligns with the agreed [overarching principles](https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/researcher-hub/career-development-reviews-fixed-term-researchers#CDR). Please check with the HR administrator in your faculty/department to know more about the local scheme adopted

Annual reviews are not linked in any way to references, discipline, reappointment or promotion.

## The purpose of the CDR conversation is to give you an opportunity to:

* take a constructive and proactive approach to progressing your professional development and preparing for onward career steps
* have a structured and confidential conversation about career-related issues in a safe and supportive environment;
* explore your professional development goals and how these can be supported;
* consider career options and pathways to gaining relevant experience;
* discuss the activities through which you have grown and developed over the last 12 months, and your plans for the coming 12 months, along with any obstacles met and any support you might need;
* reflect on your current work, and to develop a plan for the future, whether in academia, industry, public service or beyond.

## Your Reviewer

* Your line manager or PI will usually be the appropriate reviewer. They will know both you and your field and will be in a strong position to provide advice based on their experience.
* Your faculty / department may arrange for an alternative reviewer.
* If you would welcome a second career conversation with a Careers Advisor or sector specialist you are encouraged to self-refer to the Careers Service.

## The Process

This guidance note outlines a typical process for CDR conversations. Check with your local HR officer for details on the process in your department / faculty.

Before the CDR conversation:

1. The officer responsible for CDRs in your department will be in touch to let you know when your review is due and will explain the local process.
2. A template Career Conversation Planner (or equivalent) will be provided and you will usually be responsible for:
   1. completing the first draft of your Career Conversation Planner in advance of the CDR conversation;
   2. sending the completed Career Conversation Planner to your reviewer 5 days in advance of the CDR conversation;
   3. Agree with your reviewer a time and appropriate place for your CDR conversation to take place.

During and after your CDR conversation, you will usually be responsible for:

1. updating the Career Conversation Planner to incorporate agreed suggestions made at the meeting;
2. seeking the signature of the reviewer on your Career Conversation Planner[[1]](#footnote-1);
3. retain Part 1 of the Career Conversation Planner for your sole reference and send a copy of Part 2 to the officer responsible for CDRs in your department.
4. implementing the actions agreed in the conversation, as recorded in your Career Conversation Planner, and seeking additional support if required.

## The Career Conversation Planner

The Career Conversation Planner (Planner) will prompt you to think about your achievements to date, your career and development objectives, and what you can do over the next 12 months to set you on the path to achieve your objectives. Your completed Planner will frame your conversation with your reviewer. Consider the feedback from your reviewer during your meeting and update your Planner with agreed suggestions. You will get the most from the Planner if it is revisited during the year and updated as objectives are achieved or pathways adjusted.

## Planning your CDR conversation

You will get more from your CDR conversation if you do some thinking and planning beforehand. Here are some tips:

* Use the Career Conversation Planner to help you to decide on your aim for your CDR conversation and tell your reviewer via the Planner so that they can prepare.
* If you have a particular direction or profession in mind, bring any job descriptions and selection criteria that you have for the post(s) to the conversation so that you are both talking about actual positions.
* If you don’t have a specific profession or post in mind, and you would like to talk about what options you might have, start scanning vacancy boards for posts that appeal and collect job descriptions and selection criteria for those of interest to you. Pick out the features that attract you and consider why.
* Look at the gaps between your current CV and the selection criteria of the post advertised. See where the gaps are and consider how you might develop a plan to broaden your experience and skills.
* Reflect on the strength of your internal and external professional networks and your plans for nurturing and expanding them, with your career in mind.
* Note any specific skills that are holding you back or experience that is lacking and you need some help to improve and address. These may be technical or involve the job application process (e.g. interviews).
* The University embraces diversity amongst its members and seeks to achieve equity in the experience, progression and achievement of all students and staff through the implementation of transparent policies, practices and procedures and the provision of effective support3. If you feel comfortable in doing so, and you have any [protected characteristics](https://www.gov.uk/discrimination-your-rights) – particularly in relation to belonging to a minoritised group – which you feel may be relevant to your career development, and on which the department/faculty could offer support – you may wish to discuss this with your reviewer.  Other avenues for obtaining advice, guidance and support in this area include your departmental Head of Administration and HR team, departmental, divisional, or central University EDI contacts – see [EDI Contacts | Equality and Diversity Unit (ox.ac.uk).](https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/networks-and-contacts)

## In the CDR Conversation

* Use your Career Conversation Planner as the agenda for your CDR conversation.
* Have a topics for discussion and share these with your reviewer at the start of the conversation.
* Be prepared for the fact that you’re unlikely to be given ready-made answers that provide a clear and direct path to your perfect job. Your career is yours to shape and is your responsibility. Taking charge of your own career planning is a great way to demonstrate to an employer that you are proactive and self-directed.
* If you are asking a CDR reviewer about an internal promotion, remember that their options may be limited. There may be budget or work design reasons why a new post or a regrade isn’t possible and you may be encouraged to think laterally.
* Be open to suggestions that may sound surprising or left-field and don’t write anything off until you have considered it. Don’t miss a creative opportunity that would take you forward.
* Explore whether a further career development conversation with a third party would be beneficial to you. This conversation may, for example, be with a Careers Advisor from the Careers Service, or another senior colleague of the University or from your professional networks
* Consider and discuss whether you would benefit from having a [mentor](https://pod.admin.ox.ac.uk/mentoring), either as part of a formal mentoring scheme or on an informal basis via a request that you make to someone who you think could help you and might be willing to talk with you. As mentioned above, make sure that your invitation is clear about expectations.

## After the conversation

* Take some time to reflect on the discussion and consider each option generated against your goals. Which is most likely to lead towards what you seek?
* Update your Career Conversation Planner to incorporate agreed suggestions made at the meeting and any subsequent changes that you would like to make.
* Do the admin - send a copy of Part 2 of the Planner to the officer responsible for CDRs in your department, as well as retaining Part 1 for your sole reference.
* Seek additional support from a Careers Advisor if required.
* Make your plan and commit to starting it. What will you do first?

1. The purpose of the reviewers’ signature is to acknowledge and not approve the Plan. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)