



Oxford Policy Engagement Network Peer Mentoring Scheme 2023-24

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1. Summary

The University of Oxford's Policy Engagement Team and UK Civil Service Policy Profession Unit invite Expressions of Interest (Eoi) from eligible researchers and policy professionals to join the next cohort of the Oxford Policy Engagement Network (OPEN) Peer Mentoring Scheme.

In each cohort, the scheme matches 15 researchers at Oxford and 15 policy professionals at a similar career stage for six months, enabling them:

- To deepen their understanding of how research can inform policymaking and develop the relevant skills to catalyse that process;
- To broaden and deepen their academic and policy networks; and
- To strengthen leadership for academic-policy engagement.

Deadlines

- **Cohort 2 (January 2024 – August 2024): 12:00 GMT, 6 December 2023**

2. Why join the scheme?

Many researchers and policy professionals share an interest in better use of evidence in public policy, but when it comes to engaging with each other, they can feel like members of two communities divided by a common language. This unique, boundary-spanning scheme tackles this head-on, revealing to researchers and policy professionals the benefits of mentoring each other.

Since 2021, more than 60 researchers from all four academic Divisions at Oxford and policy professionals from 14 UK government departments have taken advantage of the scheme. Each has been matched with a mentoring partner at a similar career stage, usually with different research or policy interests to their own. Taking turns as mentor and mentee, participants provide each other with a sounding board, act as confidant(e), motivator, and a source of challenge and feedback, and clarify the culture, politics, and values of their respective environments.

Participants join a cohort of 30, take part in an in-person cohort-building event, and are invited to online drop-in sessions, as well as a final networking event in June 2024, providing opportunities to build wider networks with others interested in better use of evidence in public policy.

3. Objectives

The scheme aims to enable participants to achieve one or more of the following objectives:

- To deepen their understanding of how research can inform policy-making;
- To develop awareness of their relevant strengths, potential, and opportunities for professional development and leadership in academic-policy engagement;
- To plan how to acquire more of the knowledge and skills required to achieve their potential, and begin to do so;

*"I really enjoyed having a peer mentor. Although I'd engaged with many policy colleagues in my research area – infectious disease transmission and control – over the years, this new link gave me new insights into the policymaking process. I think the fact that we weren't discussing diseases allowed me to see the policy-making framework more clearly."
(Christl Donnelly, Professor of Applied Statistics, 2022 intake)*

*"The person I was paired with had a very different area of research focus [but] it was enlightening to get insight into the world of academic research and practical barriers (timescales, funding) to marrying up researchers and policymakers."
(Policy professional, 2022 intake)*

*"It really was great to create personal connections, and think more about my role as an academic and challenge my thinking."
(Researcher, 2022 intake)*

- To broaden and deepen their research and policy networks;
- To develop their understanding of mentoring, and some of the skills required to do it well; and
- To enhance their motivation to engage and build their confidence to do so.

*“I would definitely recommend the scheme to policy colleagues.”
(Policy professional, 2022 intake)*

Most previous participants have found the scheme fulfilled their initial objectives, and allowed flexibility for those to evolve during the mentoring partnership.

4. How does it work?

Matching

Two Mentoring Coordinators manage the scheme, using the online platform MentorNet, as follows:

- Once accepted onto the programme, participants will be invited to register on MentorNet and create their peer mentor profile.
- Participants will be invited to consider the profiles of 15 potential peer mentors and to inform the Mentoring Coordinators of their choice of up to three who they consider likely to be a good match for them.
- The Mentoring Coordinators will propose peer mentor pairs, taking participants’ preferences into consideration.
- Each peer mentor pair will be invited to diarise and meet in an initial 15-minute “chemistry” meeting, to explore whether the partnership is mutually agreeable. Both peer mentors will confirm with their respective Mentoring Coordinator within 24 hours whether or not they are willing to proceed with the partnership.
- Where a match is not deemed mutually agreeable, the Mentoring Coordinators may propose a new peer mentor for participants. If this is not possible, or this alternative partnership is not found to be mutually agreeable, participants will be invited to join the next cohort of the scheme instead.
- Peer mentor pairs are expected to meet at least once a month until the scheme ends, providing a short record of each meeting on MentorNet.

*“Really efficient transition from first making the application to beginning the mentorship journey and absolutely in awe of how well they matched peer mentors.”
(Feedback from 2022 intake)*

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Participants are:

- **Required to take part in an in-person, half-day meeting in Oxford** to meet other members of the cohort, share details of some of the engagement-related challenges they are facing, and offer insights that may be of common interest;
- **Expected to participate in two online sessions** in which they will have the chance to share more about their work and day-to-day responsibilities with others in the cohort;
- **Expected to take part in a final in-person networking event** for members of both cohorts, to be held in Oxford in June 2024; and
- Encouraged to be in touch with Mentoring Coordinators at any point to discuss any concerns they may have relating to the scheme.

5. How will Eols be assessed?

Eols should demonstrate an interest in, and some understanding of, either public policy in at least one area (for researchers) or academic research (for policy professionals), however, no formal experience in the other domain is necessary. They should also demonstrate how the applicant’s objectives align with the scheme’s objectives.

6. Who can apply?

Researchers

Eols are invited from OPEN members on a research or academic contract at the University of Oxford which lasts for the duration of the entire scheme (until August 2024).

Retired and Emeritus Fellows, as well as Masters and DPhil students, are ineligible.

Policy professionals

Eols are invited from any civil servant who is a member of the Policy Profession at the equivalent of grade 7 or higher.

7. How to apply

Researchers must have [joined OPEN](#) before applying.

All applicants should express interest by 12:00 BST on 6 December 2023 using [this form](#), taking careful note of the requirement to attend the cohort-building event. (See Section 10 below.)

8. Evaluation

All participants will be invited to an evaluation and networking event in June 2024 in Oxford. Participants will also be asked to complete a mid-point survey and a final evaluation questionnaire about the scheme.

9. Key contacts

If you have any questions about the scheme, or would like to discuss an Eol, please contact the relevant Mentoring Coordinator:

- For researchers: José Rojas Alvarado (jose.rojasalvarado@socsci.ox.ac.uk)
- For policy professionals: Sarah Eichhorn (sarah.eichhorn@socsci.ox.ac.uk)

10. Key dates

Action	Date
Call opens	6 November 2023
Application deadline	6 December 2023
Deadline for participants to indicate their preferred choices for peer mentor	24 January 2024
Participants seek chemistry meeting with their proposed peer mentor	25 January – 8 February 2024
Half-day, in-person cohort-building event in Oxford	29 February 2024
Networking event in Oxford	TBC (June 2024)

11. About the Oxford Policy Engagement Network

The Oxford Policy Engagement Network (OPEN) is a growing network of more than 900 researchers and professional services staff in more than 50 departments and faculties across the University who share a vision of public policy powered by the world's best available research evidence and expertise. OPEN's mission is to equip members to share knowledge and expertise with the policymaking community so that, with them, they can contribute to better policies that protect what is valuable and change the world for the better. Find out more about OPEN at www.ox.ac.uk/open.

12. About the Policy Profession

The UK Civil Service Policy Profession is the second-largest of the 28 professions in the Civil Service. Made up of around 32,000 civil servants, its aim is to design, develop and propose appropriate courses of action to help meet key government priorities and ministerial objectives. Policy professionals' work centres around three activities:

- Developing and improving government strategies
- Ensuring democratic accountability
- Overseeing delivery

Find out more about the Policy Profession at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/civil-service-policy-profession/about>.