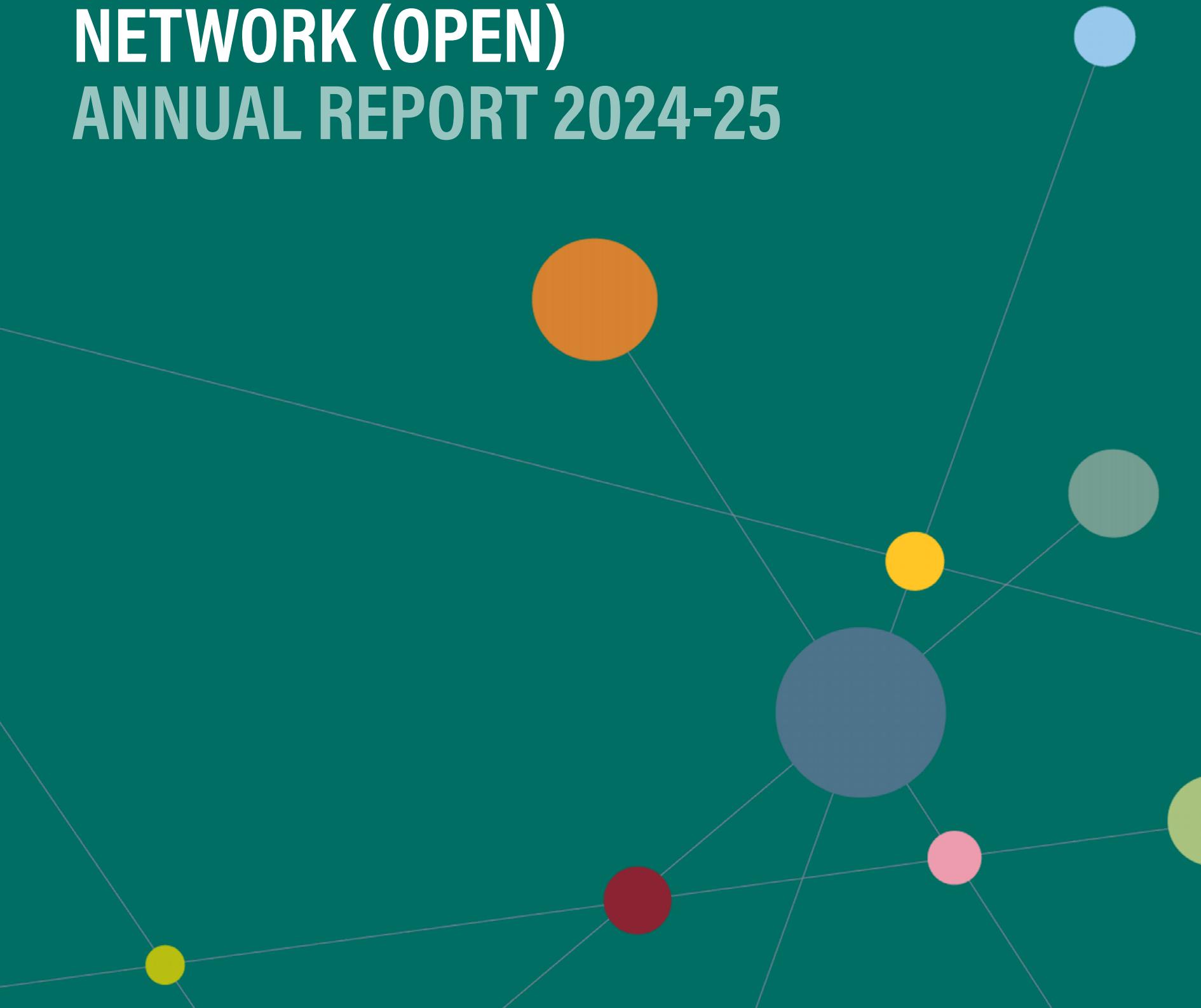




**OPEN**  
OXFORD POLICY  
ENGAGEMENT NETWORK

# OXFORD POLICY ENGAGEMENT NETWORK (OPEN) ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25



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By providing research and policy professionals with the skills, opportunities, and resources to join forces, OPEN has rapidly become a vital form of ‘connective tissue’ – for Oxford and for our partners – spanning disparate disciplines and departmental silos, brokering connections, facilitating dialogue, and building trusted partnerships. This first annual report highlights a year of ‘firsts’ – from Visiting Fellowships to the OPEN Forum – as well as impacts generated by more established OPEN programmes. As you explore the following pages, I encourage you to consider what part you might play in the network’s next chapter, and to get in touch to explore how we might work together to achieve OPEN’s enduring vision.



PROFESSOR ALEXANDER BETTS  
PRO-VICE-CHANCELLOR FOR EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT,  
SPORT, AND COMMUNITY

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# FOREWORD

For many who share OPEN’s vision of public policy powered by the world’s best research evidence and expertise, this last year has been another challenging one. Conflict and instability – from culture wars to trade wars, as well as protracted armed conflicts – have shortened policy professionals’ horizons, trapping many in emergency-response mode.

Mis- and disinformation have become increasingly AI-enabled, deepening



mistrust and fuelling fears that ‘nothing is true and everything is possible’. In many contexts, the political space and time – not to mention the resources required – for collective deliberation and collaboration, seem to be shrinking.

Yet across our growing network – in particular, in the relationships sparked and sustained by researchers across Oxford and their policy partners around the world, there’s evidence of something else, too: a shared commitment to joining forces to better tackle many of these same challenges. This is, after all, OPEN’s mission. This report offers a glimpse into the various ways we have been pursuing it, with a view to complementing the activity and achievements of others at Oxford and elsewhere.

For OPEN, this has been A Year of Firsts. As promised in our refreshed strategy, we’ve helped create new ways for policy professionals to connect and collaborate with the University. In December, we co-hosted our first visit by a parliamentary select committee. In January, we welcomed our first cohort of Visiting Fellows – policy professionals tackling challenges ranging from biosecurity to biodiversity, and skills strategy to social care, exploring these with researchers across Oxford. In June, we convened the first OPEN Forum, enabling experts from academia, government, industry, and funders to explore together specific risks to the UK’s national resilience. In July, we launched The Oxford Briefing, offering policy professionals a personalised, monthly round-up of the latest policy-

relevant research, news and opportunities from across the University. Now, we’re proud to share with you our first annual report, celebrating these and other highlights from across the network during the 12 months to July 2025.

In the pages that follow, we also wanted to share some returns on longer-term investments: how we’re lowering some of the barriers research and policy professionals face, so they can take up opportunities on which they’d otherwise miss out; how some are using skills acquired via our learning and development programme to build partnerships, secure substantial external funding, and better evaluate their impact; and how others are using funding from the OPEN Seed Fund and Public Policy Challenge Fund to pursue impactful collaboration, across the UK and around the world.

Much of this would be impossible, of course, without Research England’s Policy Support Fund, and the time, energy, and wise counsel so generously provided by our Steering Group, OPEN members, and others, in pursuit of our shared vision. We are, as ever, immensely grateful.



**WILL PRYOR**  
HEAD OF POLICY ENGAGEMENT

# WELCOMING OUR FIRST VISITING FELLOWS

In April, we had the privilege of welcoming seven experienced policy professionals to Oxford as part of a pilot for a new OPEN Visiting Fellowship. Hosted by academic departments across the University, the pilot was designed to provide mutual benefit.

Visiting Fellows would get to connect with researchers across the University, along with fresh perspectives on longstanding and emerging policy challenges. Academic host departments would, in turn, get fresh perspectives on the policy relevance of their research, learn more about how different kinds of evidence and expertise actually shape policy, and be able to draw on Visiting Fellows' expertise and wider networks in shaping research agendas, as well as engagement strategies and plans.

Our pilot enabled seven academic departments across the University to host a Visiting Fellow. Largely from the UK Civil Service, the Visiting Fellows worked with their hosts to explore a diverse range of research questions and national policy challenges, from ethical decision-making in crisis situations to the government's post-16 education and skills strategy, the strategic implications of AI, and beyond.

They took the opportunity to develop new ways of thinking and problem-solving, while their academic hosts gained insights into the pressures and constraints policy professionals face.

Fellows delved into pressing policy questions alongside researchers in their Host Departments as well as across the wider University community, bringing an interdisciplinary lens to their particular questions and challenges. Fellows and academic hosts co-designed workshops and other events that brought together a wide range of colleagues across academia and government.

## What we achieved

Fellows and their Host Departments convened over 15 workshops, seminars, and other events. These included a Skills Summit in Oxford, where the Skills Minister delivered the keynote address, and an event in Westminster, bringing together ecologists, economists, government officials and others to explore how nature can better be embedded in public decision-making.

Feedback from Fellows and Host Departments has confirmed the potential of such a programme to generate mutual benefit. All Fellows reported that the experience broadened their perspectives on their policy work, and all Host Departments noted it had deepened their understanding of the policy landscape. Fellows also agreed that their time at Oxford had a direct and meaningful impact on ongoing policy development. Host Departments all reported that the

experience resulted in a direct impact on their research and allowed them to take a step back and understand how their research fits into the broader policy landscape, which will strengthen their engagement and future impact.

## A new cohort

By the end of the 3-month pilot, almost all of the Fellows were planning follow-on activities with their Host Departments. So, when it came to planning how best to scale up the programme, we chose to make it as long as our current funding constraints permit. We've already identified ten new hosts and, together with them, can't wait to welcome this larger cohort for the first seven months of 2026. They, too, will be UK-based, but we're already considering the possibility of hosting Fellows from further afield. Watch this space!



**NOORA KANFASH**  
SOCIAL SCIENCES  
PUBLIC POLICY  
ENGAGEMENT  
FACILITATOR



**NAOMI GIBSON**  
PUBLIC AND POLICY  
ENGAGEMENT  
FACILITATOR,  
MEDICAL SCIENCES  
DIVISION

16

100%

UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENTS  
CONNECTED WITH VISITING  
FELLOWSVISITING FELLOWS  
REPORTING IMPACT ON  
POLICY DEVELOPMENT

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The Fellowship helped me to identify or recast how I look at issues relevant to areas of my work. For example, I have been able to engage with members of the Faculty, and others in the University, on the history of China's approach to problem solving in public policy and planning; how research interests are evolving towards a later postcolonial era in South Asia; and research collaboration through international partnerships. For my part, I have been able to explain what we are doing in the Foreign Office to expand capabilities and language skills because of the increasing importance of India and China as global actors, and emerging areas of focus in government.

ALEX PYKETT

(FOREIGN COMMONWEALTH AND  
DEVELOPMENT OFFICE), VISITING  
FELLOW IN THE FACULTY OF HISTORY

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Hosting one of the scheme's first cohort was incredibly valuable. The informal, ad hoc discussions around a policy area, better appreciation of the value of research to policymakers, and the expanded networks for my team and department were especially beneficial. It has helped embed what I hope will be a long-lasting, mutually valuable relationship.

PROFESSOR SARA SHAW  
ACADEMIC LEAD AT THE NUFFIELD  
DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY CARE  
HEALTH SCIENCES



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My Fellowship has highlighted to me and my colleagues the benefits of collaborating with an academic research centre, both as a neutral convener and as a source of new engagement opportunities. I have particularly valued its focus on relationship development rather than on a specific input or project: I believe this is a particularly productive way of framing and facilitating policy collaboration, given the iterative, and often unpredictable and reactive nature of policymaking.

DR HELEN TATTAM (DEPARTMENT FOR  
EDUCATION), VISITING FELLOW IN THE  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



# A NEW PLATFORM FOR COLLABORATION: THE OPEN FORUM

Conferences can provide valuable opportunities for disseminating new ideas – but all too often these survive only in the form of unfinished notes or half-remembered conversations. When the team and I began planning the first OPEN Forum, we set ourselves the goal of creating something different: a platform where ideas could be shaped collectively and where collaboration could begin in the room – not just in the weeks and months after leaving it.

The inaugural OPEN Forum in June showed what this could look like. Bringing together more than 90 experts from government, academia, and industry, the event focused on how the UK can strengthen resilience across three major risk areas: energy and environment, human health, and technology.

We knew this was an ambitious aim and, in retrospect, two decisions proved essential to the Forum's success. First,

we wanted the format and themes to reflect the priorities of both research and policy professionals. So, we consulted widely with OPEN members and policy professionals across government during the planning stages. Their insights shaped the structure of the three thematic streams, each co-led by an academic and a policy professional, ensuring that discussions engaged with the latest research as well as current policy perspectives.

Second, we sought partners from different parts of the University with deep expertise in the areas we hoped to explore. We secured collaborations with key University departments whose work aligns closely with these themes. Partnering with colleagues from the Blavatnik School of Government, the Oxford Martin School, the Pandemic Sciences Institute, and the ZERO Institute enabled us to tap into their rich networks and link them with others across the University and beyond. This brought together people who might not otherwise meet, creating the conditions to begin unpacking those three areas of risk. This approach resulted in a rich and diverse group of participants from more than 15 government departments and agencies, local authorities, funders, and businesses, alongside researchers from across the sciences and humanities.

Participants heard first from the Dean of the Blavatnik School and a keynote address by the Director of the Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms Unit, who outlined the government's evolving approach to national risk and resilience. A short

plenary discussion, chaired by the School's Chief Operating Officer, invited participants to consider how government and academia could work together to anticipate and respond better to complex challenges. Participants then dispersed into three thematic streams for focused work and discussions.

We found one of the most valuable outcomes of the Forum was the way it enabled people to connect – to understand different perspectives, build relationships, and begin collaborations that continue to develop. Feedback from participants highlighted how much they valued the opportunity to meet colleagues they might not otherwise encounter, and how those conversations helped identify shared priorities and opportunities for joint work.

As I reflect on the future of the Forum, I keep coming back to how we can make even more of the time and expertise that senior research and policy professionals bring to the room. Their insights shaped the day in profound ways, and we want to ensure that future Forums continue



90+

PARTICIPANTS

32

ORGANISATIONS  
REPRESENTED

to offer a space where their contribution is not only welcomed but genuinely maximised. At the same time, it's worth thinking about how to build an even more interdisciplinary Forum that encourages people to step outside their usual silos and discover connections between their work and that of others across the University, government, and beyond.

Sitting with these reflections, it's clear how this year's Forum proved what can happen when the right people and ideas come together. We succeeded in creating something distinct from a traditional conference, but it also reminded us that sustaining this kind of work depends on partnership. Looking ahead, we're keen to hear from new potential partners, especially funders and those in government and academia, as to how we might together build on this momentum and create further opportunities for collaboration.



JOSÉ ROJAS ALVARADO  
LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

“

I really valued the honesty in the conversations during the Forum. It was remarkable how frank people were willing to be, and equally how constructive. It helped break down the supposed dichotomy between policymakers and academics, especially with many having experience in both roles – and that made for a really strong starting point for many of the discussions. There was clear appetite to take several of those strands forward.

PROFESSOR ALICE NORTON  
(PANDEMIC SCIENCES INSTITUTE), RESEARCH LEAD,  
HEALTH STREAM



“

Discussions highlighted that an inclusive, interdisciplinary approach, drawing on expertise across the sciences and the humanities, is essential to anticipating and responding to complex risks. By working collaboratively in this 'peacetime' space, we can strengthen collective capacity and capability, while building flexible and resilient systems that enable an efficient, coordinated research response. Ultimately, it is about uniting diverse expertise to protect the public and build future resilience to infectious disease risks in the UK and beyond.

DR CHARLOTTE HALL  
(DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE), POLICY LEAD, HEALTH STREAM

# ONE CONVERSATION AT A TIME: THE POWER OF PEER MENTORING



What could a professor of music and a senior policy professional working in finance possibly gain from mentoring one another? Far more than you might expect – and their story is one I often use to show what makes our Peer Mentoring Scheme work so well.

Now in its fourth year, the scheme continues to strengthen relationships between researchers and policy professionals, fostering mutual learning, confidence, and collaboration across sectors. Delivered in partnership with the Policy Profession Unit since 2021, the scheme has supported more than

200 research and policy professionals, including nearly 60 this year from 13 government departments and 15 Oxford departments.

Alongside the cross-sector cohort we run each year, we also piloted a subject-specific cohort, developed with the Oxford Climate Research Network this round. The focus on climate, energy and the environment brought together participants who shared both thematic interests and professional challenges, which in turn allowed for more focused conversations and longer-term connections. It was exciting to hear from peer mentors that these alignments encouraged ongoing collaboration, with several planning joint seminars, research support, and continued mentoring. We also saw peer mentors experimenting with work-shadowing, arranging reciprocal visits to each other's organisations and thereby broadening their networks and seeing them at work.



Beyond one-to-one conversations, both cohorts joined a networking event over the summer. The programme combined workshops, panel discussions and a 'speed networking' session over lunch, giving participants more time to reflect on their peer mentoring experience, plan how they'd apply any learnings to their future engagement, and connect with the wider OPEN community. We were particularly grateful to speakers from the Government Office for Science, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, as well as colleagues from across Oxford's academic divisions. Feedback across both cohorts was very positive, with many peer mentors telling us the experience exceeded their expectations and praising both their match and the balance between structure and flexibility that shaped their conversations. Their reflections also gave us a clearer sense of how the scheme can keep evolving.

## 13

GOVERNMENT  
DEPARTMENTS  
INVOLVED

Opening the programme to Senior Executive Officers this year, for example, showed just how much those earlier in their careers value the chance to build confidence and cross-sector understanding through peer mentoring. We also heard that a little more guidance at the very beginning would help pairs ease into their conversations. Taking this on board, we're looking at ways to offer prompts in those first meetings, while keeping the flexibility that mentors consistently tell us they appreciate.

All of this echoed what I saw in that pairing I talked about earlier, and in so many others this year. Once people have the right match and the right support to get started, the value comes from the conversations themselves: the chance to step outside their usual environment, talk something through with someone who sees it differently, and make sense of challenges that would otherwise stay stuck in their heads. These exchanges often spark new ideas and connections, showing why it is important for OPEN to keep creating spaces where this kind of learning and collaboration can take place.



JOSÉ ROJAS ALVARADO  
LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

“

I absolutely loved this experience. I have learned a lot about policymaking in a way that is not possible via taught courses. I've also built new useful connections. I think your approach has been excellent in providing guidance and advice, but also allowing freedom in how to define our relationships.

RESEARCH PROFESSIONAL PEER MENTOR, 2024-25

## SPOTLIGHT

OPEN has deepened my understanding of how academic insights can inform and strengthen government policy on climate, energy, and net zero delivery. OPEN events have expanded my network with researchers in different disciplines and policy professionals across government who share an interest in evidence-based policymaking and just transition principles, encouraging me to integrate more research-led approaches into my work, particularly around governance frameworks for net zero delivery. At a broader level, OPEN has influenced my leadership mindset, reinforcing the value of curiosity, cross-sector collaboration, and openness to challenge. It has also strengthened my motivation to embed more inclusive and data-informed decision-making across teams, helping to bridge the gap between research, policy, and implementation.

JUSTIN PLACIDE  
(PEER MENTOR 2024-25, DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO)



I joined the OPEN Peer Mentoring Scheme in 2023 to deepen my understanding of how academic research can address policy challenges in a timely way. My partner and I built a strong, mutually trusting relationship, sharing in-depth insights into the complex, often unpredictable reality of policy and research processes. It led me to undertake – with OPEN funding – a four-month placement at the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to help shape the UK government's consultation on principles for high integrity carbon and nature markets, co-developed with the Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs. The collaboration has continued beyond my placement and I'm now an advisor to the British Standards Institute on community engagement in nature market standards.

DR CAITLIN HAFFERTY  
(PEER MENTOR 2023-24, SCHOOL OF GEOGRAPHY AND THE ENVIRONMENT)



# IN FOCUS: UK BUSINESS AND TRADE POLICY



How can the UK achieve the government's goal of delivering the highest level of sustained growth in the G7? How can the country develop a trade policy that strengthens economic resilience? Which partnerships, institutions and policy tools should it prioritise to successfully navigate ongoing geopolitical tensions while promoting open, sustainable, and rules-based trade?

These were just some of the questions tackled by business and trade policy experts from Westminster, Whitehall and beyond who visited Oxford this year with support from OPEN.

In December, we were delighted to support Professor Ngaire Woods and colleagues at the Blavatnik School of Government in welcoming members of the House of Commons Business and Trade Committee to Oxford as part of a nation-wide consultation with researchers, businesses, trade unions, consumer groups, and other stakeholders to help shape the committee's priorities for this Parliament. During a roundtable discussion with representatives of local business and senior academics specialising in employment law, the green transition, innovation and productivity, taxation, and other areas, committee members had the chance to test and develop their thinking. The committee's chair, Liam

Byrne MP, welcomed the opportunity to draw on the 'wealth of ideas, research and fresh thinking', which fed into the committee's subsequent report, [Priorities of the Business and Trade Committee](#) and informed its decision to launch inquiries into industrial relations and the Employment Rights Bill; export led growth; industrial strategy; access to finance and investment; small business support and growth; and corporate governance.

In July, also at the Blavatnik, more than 140 experts convened for the Trade and Public Policy (TaPP) Network annual conference. These included policy professionals responsible for design and implementation of UK trade policy; representatives of multilaterals and diplomats, as well as representatives of business, industry and civil society. In addition to some of the questions set out above, they discussed ways that UK trade policy might better balance the



competing demands of growth, security, digital transformation, environmental sustainability, and labour rights, and support domestic priorities as well as global development goals. In just three years, with support from PolicyBristol, OPEN and others, TaPP has become the UK's largest academic trade-policy network and a vital piece of national infrastructure for increasing the breadth and depth of evidence available to decision-makers, and helping inform public debate about UK trade policy.



NOORA KANFASH, SOCIAL SCIENCES PUBLIC POLICY ENGAGEMENT FACILITATOR

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Structural siloes - in academia, government, or elsewhere - are a huge brake on our collective ability to shape better public policy in any area, including UK trade policy. Overcoming these siloes is critical to supporting the UK government in navigating these turbulent times for global trade. The Trade and Public Policy Network makes it easier for decision-makers to tap into the best available research evidence and expertise in UK trade policy.

PROFESSOR EMILY JONES  
(BLAVATNIK SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT)



# ALL SYSTEMS GO!



In May 2025, Beth Hogben, Head of the Mid-Career Scientists Programme at the Government Office for Science (GOS), joined the [OPEN Steering Group](#). In October, Beth sat down with Jacqui Broadhead, who chairs the Steering Group, for a wide-ranging conversation about the year in review, as well as the skills, systems and relationships that underpin OPEN's mission.

## Shared motivations

Jacqui began by reflecting on how her research on migration and integration had long involved working with policy professionals. A longstanding member of OPEN, she had jumped at the chance to serve as the University's academic champion for policy engagement. The role, she explained, had forced her to think more about systems: how can the University better support engagement by research professionals and students in different disciplines, and at different career stages? She had also wanted 'more voices of policy professionals' involved in shaping OPEN's future, so she had been delighted that Beth had agreed to get involved.

Beth recalled that she had spent much of her career at the science-policy interface, becoming increasingly preoccupied by the question of how government used evidence, 'particularly science, because that's my background, but also evidence more broadly' to make decisions. 'I'm very supportive of the work you're doing,' she

said, pointing to OPEN initiatives such as its unique peer mentoring scheme, which matches policy professionals in and outside the Civil Service with research professionals across the University.

## Delivering on strategic commitments

Asked about highlights from the past year, Jacqui pointed to the refresh of the OPEN Strategy and its emphasis on complementarity and catalysing connectivity. 'Lots of researchers are out there doing policy engagement a lot of the time,' she said. OPEN's role was to support them, as needed, she added, and make engagement easier – for example, by 'providing opportunities for hands-on experience, particularly at earlier stages in their careers, and for those who don't already have connections'.

Jacqui also highlighted a specific commitment in the strategy: the launch of the [OPEN Visiting Fellowship](#). This had already sparked some surprising

collaborations, she noted, such as one between ethicists at the Oxford Uehiro Institute and one of the Cabinet Office team responsible for government preparedness and crisis response, which had focused on ethical decision-making in emergencies. 'That might not be the first connection you'd think of,' she said, 'but it shows how new types of engagement can emerge.'

Another milestone was the inaugural [OPEN Forum](#) – another commitment in the strategy – which had focused on three aspects of risk and resilience affecting the UK: energy and the environment; human health; and technology. Departments and units with strengths in these areas had collaborated in convening experts from academia, government, industry and funding agencies. The format, Jacqui noted, combined the University's research excellence with strategic partnerships: 'The thinking was: here's where we already have real strengths, we have existing partnerships – and here are new ones we can grow. That feels really exciting.'

## Strengthening skills

Beth asked about challenges that researchers faced when new to policy engagement. Jacqui noted that successful collaboration depended on mutual recognition by research and policy professionals of each other's expertise. The most productive interactions were co-productive, she said, not just a one-way transmission of answers from academia to government or parliament. Developing the capacity for co-production and a longer-term conversation was itself a skill – one that required understanding each other's constraints, too, whether political or resource-related.

Beth agreed that such skills were vital and not easily learned. Policy teams often work to much shorter timeframes than researchers. 'The difference between going deep into a subject and the reality of working to tight policy deadlines –

that can be quite stark,' she said. This sometimes meant relying on rapid reviews of existing evidence rather than commissioning new research.

## Incentives and institutional change

Jacqui emphasised that Research England's Policy Support Fund had been invaluable, enabling OPEN to offer, alongside bigger awards via the [Public Policy Challenge Fund](#), smaller grants via the [OPEN Seed Fund](#) that allow researchers and policy partners to 'dip a toe in the water' – opportunities that are 'low-risk, easy to apply for, and don't take too much time.' Yet gaps remain between these early partnerships and the resources needed to sustain them long term.

Asked whether government's own incentives supported engagement, Beth pointed to the Civil Service [Policy Profession Standards](#), which prized the ability to commission, understand and use data, evidence, and advice, but noted that practical barriers persisted. Almost every government department, as well as several agencies, now had a Chief Scientific Adviser. This was underpinned by a 'renewed drive to make the Civil Service more scientific', with senior civil servants modelling a culture of curiosity and evidence use.

She also highlighted publication of more departmental [Areas of Research Interest](#) (ARIs), as well as new initiatives by GOS, such as [Routes for Academic Engagement](#), and directories for [academia-to-policy](#) and [policy-to-academia](#) exchange schemes. 'I think there's even more we can do to make routes visible and help with engagement,' she said.

## Visibility and 'shop windows'

Looking ahead, Jacqui noted Oxford's breadth of research as both an advantage and a challenge when it comes to navigation. OPEN had a role to play in making it easier for policy professionals to navigate the University and connect with researchers. Welcoming the transparency of the government's ARIs, she echoed the Vice-Chancellor, who had called for a better coordinated 'shop window' for policy engagement at Oxford. Beth liked the metaphor. Government, too, she said, needed clearer 'shop windows' for its evidence needs – and, crucially, 'people crossing the street' in both directions. 'It's about the porosity of government to evidence,' she said, ensuring ideas and expertise flow freely.

## Challenging and supporting government

In closing, Jacqui spoke of a balancing act between 'on the one hand, curiosity-driven research and researchers doing their own thing and, on the other, putting a thumb on the scale and saying that particular policy areas are strategically important for government and academia. We always want that balance,' she concluded, 'engaged with policy, but not led by it – so that research can challenge as well as support government.'



BETH HOGBEN  
HEAD OF MID-CAREER SCIENTISTS PROGRAMME,  
GOVERNMENT OFFICE FOR SCIENCE



JACQUI BROADHEAD  
CHAIR, STEERING GROUP

# BROADENING ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES

From regulating a dynamic AI landscape to ensuring national energy supplies are responsibly balanced with their climate impacts, better public policy often requires us to ask better questions. That's why we're determined to reach beyond the 'usual suspects' and connect research and policy professionals with the latest opportunities to shape these questions and co-develop context-sensitive solutions. The OPEN Alert and Oxford Briefing are two initiatives that are helping to make and sustain these connections.

## The OPEN Alert

This year, the OPEN Alert – a weekly update on the latest policy engagement opportunities, tailored to subscribers' interests and preferences – reached more people than ever before, 15% more to be precise. We shared just under 1,300 opportunities with over 1,200 research professionals in nearly every department at Oxford.

The OPEN Alert provides research professionals and graduate students with information about funding, learning and networking opportunities, as well as the latest UK government consultations and parliament inquiries. For example, over the last year, more than 60 Oxford researchers submitted evidence to 36 Parliament inquiries and at least 14% of these submissions were prompted by authors who first came across the inquiry via the OPEN Alert. Some of the many themes on which subscribers have engaged with the UK government and Parliament via opportunities shared include: What are the costs, risks, and benefits of capturing greenhouse gases and permanently storing them underground? What are the opportunities and challenges relating to the UK space sector? What best practices ought to inform reform and rehabilitation in prison systems? What considerations are needed to determine the feasibility and development of community energy aid initiatives?

We're always aiming to strengthen these connections with and between research and policy professionals. In the coming year, we're thus looking to improve systems to track how, when, and to what end Alert opportunities have been taken up by members. We'll then use this information to further inform work around broadening access to opportunities and enhancing engagement.

## The Oxford Briefing

When consulted during the refresh of the OPEN Strategy, 95% of policy professionals told us they'd welcome

regular updates about opportunities to engage with policy-related research and researchers at the University. Most wanted a monthly round-up. In response to this clear request, in July we launched The Oxford Briefing: a monthly round-up of the latest policy-relevant research, outputs, news and opportunities from across Oxford. Learning from our experience with the OPEN Alert, we've tailored it to subscribers' individual preferences, offering busy policy professionals the content they need most, as well as the option to change their preferences if they take on new challenges, thereby mitigating the effect of 'churn' in the Civil Service and elsewhere. The Oxford Briefing makes it easier for them to spot relevant expertise, initiatives or findings. It offers researchers a new and effective means to alert decision-makers to cutting-edge research and spark engagement with them. In this way it's helping strengthen the 'connective tissue' for policy engagement. The early signs are really encouraging: we already have more than 400 subscribers from Westminster, Whitehall and beyond.



ROSALEEN CUNNINGHAM  
SENIOR COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER



UMME HANI IMANI  
COMMUNICATIONS AND EVENTS OFFICER

## SPOTLIGHT

Having spotted in the OPEN Alert that the UK Parliament was calling for evidence in an inquiry on the UK engagement with space, I forwarded the call to my colleague and leader of the Oxford Space Initiative, Professor Marc Ventresca. Marc and his colleague Mehdi Montakhabi jumped at the opportunity and submitted written evidence. We were thrilled to see that the Committee's report referenced Marc and Mehdi's evidence - this is a great result for our Oxford researchers, for the Oxford Space Initiative, and for UK engagement in space.

**AMY MILLIGAN**  
(SAÏD BUSINESS SCHOOL)



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The OPEN Alerts highlight a whole host of upskilling events that I regularly attend and identify opportunities for policy engagement in the basic discovery sciences.

**DR EMMA LALANDE**  
(DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICS)



**1.2K+**

OPEN ALERT  
SUBSCRIBERS

**1284**

OPPORTUNITIES  
SHARED

## SPOTLIGHT

When I saw a call for evidence on UK aid for community energy in the Alert, it seemed like the perfect fit to my research. I pulled together a team and we co-drafted a piece. To cover all our expertise, my mentor Stephanie Hirmer led a second piece. This was my first time submitting to an inquiry – so I was nervous! – but it went really well. Both pieces of written evidence were published, and I was also invited to provide oral evidence. Following this great experience, I've continued to keep an eye on OPEN Alerts and advocated for group members to contribute where relevant. For instance, my DPhil student Haruna Inuwa recently led a published contribution related to UK aid in Nigeria, his home country.

**DR ALYCIA LEONARD**  
(DEPARTMENT OF ENGINEERING)



# PARTNERSHIPS FOR POLICY

What is the most pressing public policy challenge? Mitigating the effects of climate change? Maybe adaptation or resilience? What about the spread of antimicrobial resistance? Or the governance of AI? When considering where to allocate scarce resources, the temptation to set thematic or geographical priorities is strong.

When it comes to allocation of OPEN funding, however, we take a different approach, prioritising high-quality partnerships and strong project design with the potential for impact. In doing so, we're aiming to complement activities



across and beyond the University and encourage engagement that involves a wide range of research disciplines and policy challenges.

This year, OPEN funding supported projects addressing challenges ranging from those relating to international development, human rights, and health, through to energy, education and the

environment. Some involved exploratory conversations and workshops, while others took the form of placements within policymaking organisations and development of new policymaking tools.

## Catalysing new connections

Funding this year catalysed engagement between 24 research and policy partners who had not worked together before, providing the crucial first opportunity to move from initial scoping discussions to structured collaboration and mutual learning.

**Improving fair access to green space:** In partnership with Plymouth City Council and the Woodland Trust, Dr Martha Crockatt built on earlier OPEN-funded work to develop a tool to help prioritise neighbourhoods most in need of green-infrastructure investment. 'This will enable us to work more effectively with investors and funders to deliver socially and environmentally impactful projects in



support of strategies such as Plymouth's Plan for People and Nature,' concluded Chris Avent, Strategic Programme Manager for the council's Natural Environment Service. Dr Crockatt is now exploring how the work could support the development of similar tools across the UK.

**A new approach to public sector contracting:** Contracts work better when relationships come first. That's the idea behind formal-relational contracting, which acknowledges services can't be fixed upfront and places learning, collaboration and continuous adaptation at the centre of procurement. Dr Felix Anselm van Lier and Michael Gibson's collaboration with Southwark Council and Public Digital involved co-design and testing of a practical toolkit to support this approach, which is already being used

by Essex County Council to shape a new community of practice on purpose-driven commissioning.

#### **Meeting the challenges of the Ivory Act:**

Ever tried to distinguish one kind of ivory from another? It's harder than it sounds. In fact, the UK has limited expertise on identifying and dating different ivories, representing a key challenge in implementing the current legislation. To address this, Ashley Coutu joined forces with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Victoria and Albert Museum to generate policy recommendations and resources to support implementation of the Ivory Act 2022 and enforcement capability via a new network of research, policy and museum professionals.



**35**

**POLICY  
ORGANISATIONS  
IN PARTNERSHIPS**

**5**

**CONTINENTS  
HOSTING  
PROJECTS**

#### **Converting gender-focused research into policy impact:**

Dr Janina Jochim and colleagues established a collaboration with the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), a global partnership hosted by UNICEF focused on advancing gender equality in and through education, contributing to the development of a research agenda and evidence briefs now used to further UNGEI's mission to shape education policy and programming across Sub-Saharan Africa. In Mexico, Dr César Palacios-González's partnership with an NGO, Information Group on Reproductive Choice (GIRE), generated interdisciplinary research and a white policy paper on preventing obstetric violence, directly informing GIRE's policy recommendations for reforms to Mexico's maternal-health legislation.

#### **Examining AI adoption in the classroom:**

What is the impact of AI use in schools on policy? This was the focus of a collaboration between Dr Sara Ratner and the OECD's PISA for Schools team, in which they examined how school systems interpret and act on assessment data, contributing directly to the OECD's global evidence base. Their findings were shared with the PISA Governing Board, representing 83 education ministries worldwide.

## Deepening and expanding collaboration

As well as investing in these formative partnerships, OPEN has supported the deepening of existing partnerships to tackle new challenges or build on previous work.

**Enhancing cities' support for migrants:** Irregular migration requires national and local authorities to balance humanitarian, economic and national security concerns. In this context, Myriam Cherti used OPEN funding to build on an existing relationship with policy advisers in the City of Utrecht on design of an app providing irregular migrants with clear, reliable information about local services. Launched in June, this has laid the groundwork for a municipal ID card to expand access for irregular migrants to essential services and protections, sparking interest from other cities in the Netherlands.

**Leveraging languages expertise for policy:** From strengthening community cohesion to improving access to public services, research on languages and

linguistics has a lot to offer public policy. Having met at an OPEN event in 2023, Charlotte Ryland and her partner in the Cross-Government Languages Group developed a [set of resources](#) supporting engagement between languages researchers and policy professionals. These are helping UK civil servants understand the full scope of this untapped potential, and how to leverage it more efficiently and effectively – for example in subsequent iterations of departmental Areas of Research Interest.

**Guiding abolition of the death penalty:** There are over 40 countries in the world that retain death penalty laws yet have not carried out executions for more than 10 years. Researchers Professor Carolyn Hoyle and Daniel Cullen and Director of the Death Penalty Project, Parvais Jabbar, worked with international organisations to develop a new [intellectual framework](#) to analyse the death penalty under this situation of 'de facto abolition', intended to support policymakers in these countries to overcome the barriers to full abolition (see photo above of the partners at the

UN in Geneva for the framework's launch event). Their work contributed to a multi-year effort by the partners and local civil society groups to abolish the death penalty in Zimbabwe, which came to fruition in December.

## A fairer, leaner, better value funding system

Over the coming year, we look forward to building on the work we've done to streamline OPEN's funding schemes via our refined scoring criteria and increased emphasis on value for money. We'll also seek to make schemes more inclusive and improve how we monitor, learn from and evaluate the partnerships we fund.



JESS HEDGE  
OPEN COORDINATOR

## SPOTLIGHT

'My placement gave me invaluable experience, insights and motivation to further engage with policymakers and provided a key stepping stone to my new role as one of three Chief Scientific Advisors to Oxfordshire County Council. This wouldn't have been possible without supportive guidance and funding from OPEN.'

*Dr Joanna Crocker (Department of Primary Health Care Sciences) undertook an OPEN-funded placement with Oxfordshire County Council to explore how partnerships between community, policy and academic organisations can be optimised to address health inequalities.*



## SPOTLIGHT

'OPEN has been fundamental to my research career and impact. I was a recipient of one of the first OPEN awards, enabling me to co-develop with local councils a natural capital mapping system. This blossomed into an entire range of follow-on projects funded from multiple sources. This last year, I've worked on another OPEN-funded project, enabling our team to develop that earlier work into an open-source tool, which is now informing several local nature recovery strategies in various counties in England.'

*In 2018, Dr Alison Smith (School of Geography and the Environment) partnered with Oxfordshire County Council and others to maximise the socio-economic benefits of green infrastructure.*



# THE BREADTH OF OUR ENGAGEMENT

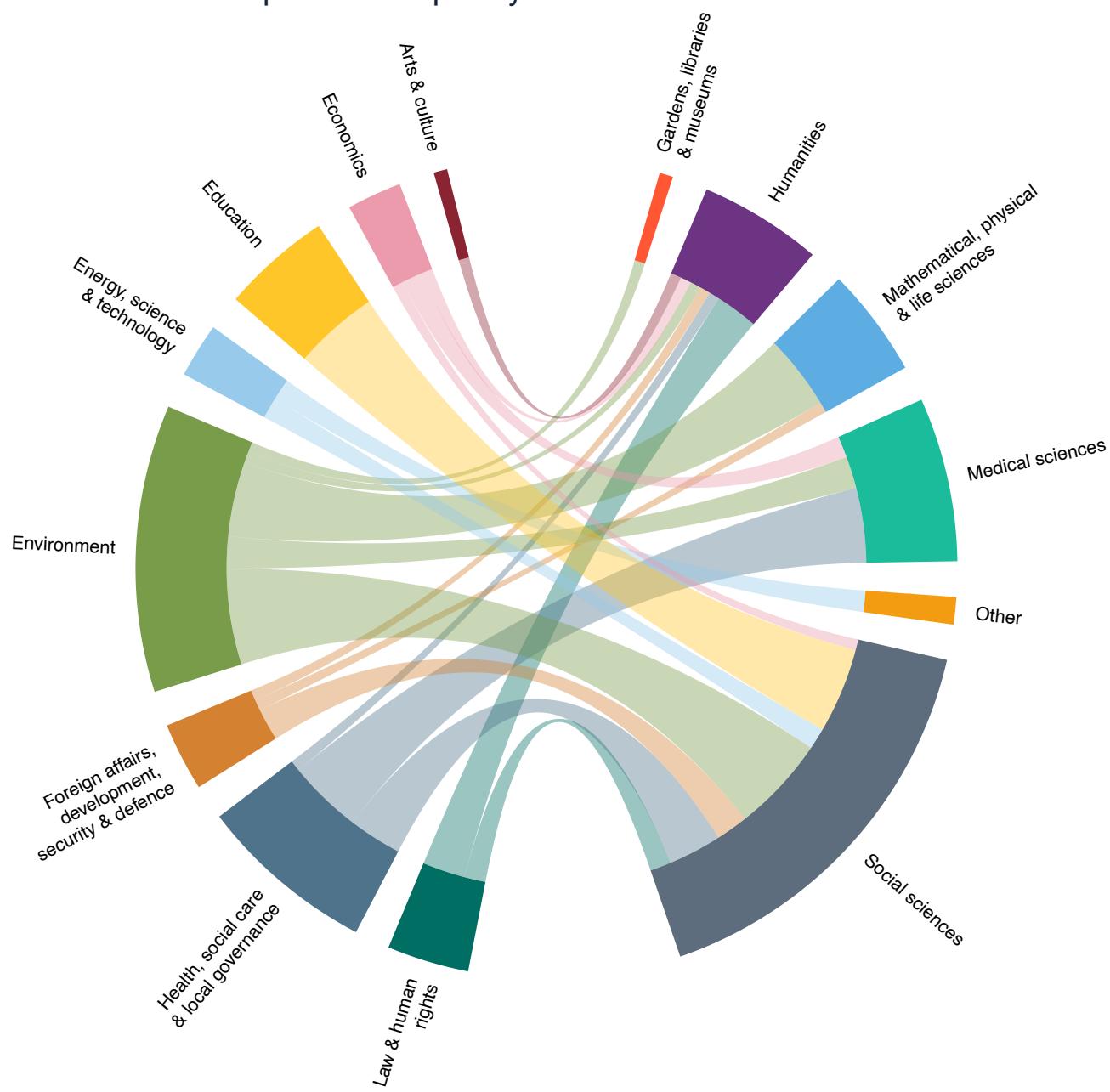
This year, OPEN funding enabled engagement locally, nationally and internationally, involving policy professionals employed by organisations in 14 countries. OPEN supported 62 partnerships between research and policy professionals across a variety of research disciplines and policy areas.

1400+

RESEARCHERS  
PARTICIPATING

140+

POLICY  
PROFESSIONALS  
PARTICIPATING



# FROM LEARNING TO ACTION: BUILDING CONFIDENCE FOR POLICY ENGAGEMENT

One of the things I enjoy most about my role is designing the learning and development programme each term - though it certainly comes with its challenges. How do you meet the differing needs of more than 1,200 research professionals seeking to connect with policy professionals across and outside the UK? And how do you speak to their different career stages, diverse backgrounds, and areas of expertise. 'It's not rocket science,' you might say. But sometimes – well, it actually is.

With the strength of our network and the support of the policy engagement team, we make it work, and this year's programme pushed that ambition further than ever. 2025 has been our busiest year yet, bringing together over 300

participants across Oxford and beyond for 19 learning, development and networking events. Through these activities, we have supported students, research and policy professionals to develop the skills and confidence to engage more effectively with one another.

Each term's programme is designed to meet participants where they are in their engagement journey. Our introductory sessions, such as *Getting Started in Policy Engagement*, offer a foundation for those new to the policy landscape, helping them understand the different ways that research informs decision-making. This year, we trialled an online delivery of this session – our largest L&D event to date - alongside in-person workshops tailored to the differing interests of Oxford's four academic divisions. These sessions introduced different parts of the policy ecosystem, showed how research and other evidence is used within them, and highlighted practical routes for researchers to contribute. Outcomes attributed to this introductory training include one participant using this knowledge to secure a policy internship at the Royal Society.

For those ready to deepen their engagement, we delivered a series of more advanced workshops that provided space to explore specific challenges, share experience, and refine strategies. Our session on stakeholder mapping helped researchers identify key audiences

and connect with them thoughtfully and strategically. Meanwhile, our new *Bridging the Gap: Policy Communication for Researchers*, developed in collaboration with colleagues from the University's Public Affairs Directorate (PAD) – strengthened participants' ability to communicate their research clearly and credibly across different policy settings. It has been encouraging to hear that this training is already generating new interest from policy professionals in participants' work.

At the heart of our programme this year were the OPEN Conversations: a series of practitioner-led discussions designed to make policy engagement more accessible. Topics ranged from the challenges of international policy engagement to the question of how historical and archival research can inform contemporary decision-making. Another session examined how citizens' assemblies can strengthen the relationship between evidence, participation, and policy. Speakers included experts from Oxfordshire County Council, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and Mexico's Ministry of Energy, as well as the Mahidol Oxford Tropical Medicine Research Unit in Bangkok and departments across Oxford.

A personal highlight for me was a masterclass unlocking the experience of Professor Robin May, Chief Scientific Adviser at the Food Standards Agency,

and Professor Sir Charles Godfray, Director of the Oxford Martin School, who discussed how researchers can contribute to policy while retaining independence and rigour. Drawing on their experience advising government, they reflected on when and how evidence is taken up, addressing questions of trust, timing, and communication.

Something we constantly see across our programme is how much people value opportunities to connect. After more than two years in this role, I've learned that the chance to expand their networks is one of the things participants appreciate most – which is, after all, why many people join a network like OPEN in the first place, isn't it? So, this year, we organised three networking events, including our first OPEN Networking Day, which brought together two cohorts of peer mentors, holders of Seed Fund and Challenge Fund awards, and others, creating new links across the community.

Looking back on this year's programme, what stands out is that it has been both rewarding and energising for OPEN L&D, while also highlighting the ongoing challenges and opportunities involved in creating learning opportunities for those who want to shape policy with the best available research. And if you've made it to this point in the section, I'd like to invite you to join us in that work – and who knows, you might find yourself expanding your own networks and developing new skills along the way.



JOSÉ ROJAS ALVARADO  
LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

“

I work in a research support role, which is all about connecting stakeholders. Attending the OPEN stakeholder mapping and policy impact sessions improved my confidence in approaching government policy teams and representing the project. I've been able to develop my elevator pitch, which has garnered interest in the programme, and I'm equipped with the tools to monitor the impact of our network.

DR SARAH COY  
(DEPARTMENT OF ENGINEERING)



“

The skills, confidence and outlook from the training opportunities OPEN provides have enabled me to form collaborations across policy, research and funding organisations that has resulted in a collaborative MRC Biomedical Data Science leadership award for £400,000.

DR CHARLOTTE GEORGE  
(RADCLIFFE DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE)



# OUR STEERING GROUP

The OPEN Steering Group advises on strategy, planning, allocation of funding, and evaluation. The Academic Champion for Policy Engagement chairs the group, which includes researchers at the University in a wide range of disciplines and at different career stages, heads of colleges, and policy professionals.



**PROFESSOR ALEXANDER BETTS**  
PRO-VICE-CHANCELLOR FOR  
EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT,  
SPORT, AND COMMUNITY



**DR ALICE NORTON**  
LEAD OF PSI POLICY AND  
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POPULATION HEALTH

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Department of Computer Science  
Department of Education  
Department of Experimental Psychology  
Department of International Development  
Department of Materials  
Department of Physics  
Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics  
Department of Primary Care Health Sciences  
Department of Psychiatry  
Department of Social Policy and Intervention  
Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies  
Faculty of English  
Faculty of History  
Faculty of Law  
Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages  
Faculty of Music  
Kellogg College  
Gardens, Libraries and Museums  
Nuffield Department of Medicine  
Oxford Martin School  
Oxford School of Global and Area Studies

Pandemic Sciences Institute

Social Sciences Divisional Office  
School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography

School of Geography and the Environment  
Uehiro Oxford Institute  
ZERO Institute

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Department for Business and Trade  
Department for Education  
Department for Energy Security and Net Zero  
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Department for Health and Social Care

Department for Transport

Department for Work and Pensions

Food Standards Agency

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Government Office for Science

Healthcare Services Safety Investigation Body

Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner  
Justice

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

NHS England Adult Secure Clinical Reference Group

NHS Resolution

Office for Students  
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OECD  
Panthera-Brazil  
Private Office of the President (Republic of South Africa)  
This Life Cambodia  
UN Girls Education Initiative  
United Nations Foundation  
Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority

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You can contact us at [researchandpublicpolicy@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:researchandpublicpolicy@admin.ox.ac.uk). We welcome enquiries from research and policy professionals, and from other individuals and organisations who share our values and are interested in supporting our mission.

OPEN is part of a wider ecosystem at the University that supports engagement between research professionals and those in the public and private sectors, as well as in civil society. Find out more at [www.ox.ac.uk/research/engage-with-us](http://www.ox.ac.uk/research/engage-with-us).

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This report was written with the help of ChatGPT Edu and carefully reviewed by our team for accuracy and appropriateness.

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