



# CONNECTIONS

OxRSS provides Oxford research staff with a voice and networking opportunities

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## CONNECT WITH US

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## TRIP TO BLENHEIM PALACE



On Saturday 3 September, OxRSS members and their families and friends visited Blenheim Palace. The Churchill Exhibition and the Palace State Rooms offered an escape from the rain. We ventured outside to explore the gardens and 'Capability' Brown landscape. A miniature train ride took us to the Pleasure Gardens, where we wandered through the Marlborough Hedge Maze before warming up in the Butterfly House. As a bonus, we got to see the Salon Privé Supercar Show, featuring some of the world's fastest, most desirable and luxurious supercars! OxRSS will return for 'Christmas at Blenheim', where the estate will be illuminated for an after dark festive trail along winding paths, tranquil waters, and the scented Fire Garden. Date and time will be announced soon!

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- 14 October, Wall climbing taster, Oxford Brookes University
- 27 October, OxRSS monthly social at University Club
- 5 November, fireworks, South Parks
- 11 November, Oxford Annual Wine fair, Randolph Hotel
- 24 November, OxRSS monthly social at University Club
- Early December, Christmas at Blenheim Palace Christmas
- 20 December, OxRSS Christmas Dinner, Exeter College

## HOW DO YOU GET A COLLEGE AFFILIATION?

The University of Oxford has no central, uniform policy on including researchers in college life, reflecting the devolved nature of the university. If you are interested in a college affiliation, the opportunities are out there, though you will probably have to be proactive! Even if you do not have a formal link with a college, numerous research centres, guest lectures, workshops, and seminars are held in colleges. These events are open to anyone to attend whether they are a member of the college or not.

You can seek college affiliation in several ways:

### 1. Junior Research Fellowships.

These fellowships and other college roles (such as research membership of Common Room or non-stipendiary research fellowships) are advertised [here](#). Colleges also post opportunities on their own websites and in the [Oxford Gazette](#).

### 2. Nomination from college member.

Speak to your manager, supervisor, or another colleague who already holds a college affiliation. Many colleges accept proposals from existing members for new members, and they may be willing to put you forward.

### 3. College tutoring

The level of responsibilities, benefits, and duration of these positions are at the discretion of the college. Again, it is helpful if senior members of your department support

your application to be a college tutor at their own colleges. You could also approach the Senior Tutor in the college saying what teaching you would be able to offer. A key focus for OxRSS is to increase teaching opportunities for research staff, and we will provide more information on this in future newsletters.

### 4. Senior Common Room (SCR) memberships.

Research staff can apply for membership of the SCR in a college with the support of a Fellow of the college. The nomination process is dependent on the college and may take some time. An annual fee may be requested and members may have to pay for their own meals, but can enjoy other benefits.

### 5. Associate Membership of Middle Common Room (MCR)

This is relatively easy to obtain with the support of your line manager and requires a fee. Some researchers prefer to become a member of the SCR as they share more in common with SCR members.

OxRSS has begun organising college dinners to give researchers a taste of college benefits, not the least of which is the opportunity to meet others working in different subjects and fields across the University. Our next one will be the OxRSS Christmas dinner at Exeter College!

## NEW TO THE UNIVERSITY?



The University hosts a welcome event for research staff three times per year. Meet other researchers, and get information on support and career development for staff! You may also find useful information regarding the University, welcome events, accommodation, and other general information [here](#).

## FEATURED PROFILE

**Dr. Emily Troscianko**

**Postdoctoral Training Coordinator, Humanities Division, 2015-2016**

Oddly enough, none of the four Divisions has a permanent member of staff dedicated to postdoctoral training and support. The Humanities Division trialled the post of Postdoctoral Training Coordinator as a 0.3FTE role in 2015-16, but the financial future of the position is uncertain. It seems clear, though, that there's much to gain from differentiating between provision for DPhils and postdocs (or the more flexible term I prefer: early-career academics, ECAs).

In my year in the post, I trialled a series of events and schemes to support ECAs in their complex professional lives, from the work- and career-focused to the welfare-orientated. My guiding principle was that it's crucial to understand academic goals in their broader context. This can be understood in a number of ways, including:

**Academic work and the rest of life.** Without really planning it, a lot of what I did ended up offering support for the everyday practice of writing. We already have an **Early Career Writers' Workshop**. I helped establish the consistently oversubscribed **Academic Writing Group**, run twice weekly by Alice Kelly as a space for 12 people to sit together and write for two timed sessions. I managed the new [Writing Partnerships and Peer Mentoring Scheme](#), which pairs people (ECAs and DPhils) from similar fields and with similar requests for time, place, and frequency of meeting, and offers weekly writing tip emails and partnership lunches. DPhils can also ask to be paired with ECAs or vice versa to bring a mentoring element into the relationship. This gives DPhils a chance to seek advice from a junior academic who is not their supervisor, and gives ECAs the opportunity to share their expertise and gain experience in graduate support. I also ran

**Writing Bootcamps**, scheduled outside full term to allow for five consecutive mornings of focused writing, with inspirational quotes, food and drink, and exercises (both intellectual and physical). A **Coping with Complexity** workshop led by Barbara Gabrys (former MPLS Academic Advisor) also proceeded on the important assumption that things other than work deserve their place in the time-management 'quadrant of value'.

**Academia and other professional opportunities.**

Here I focused on the idea of a 'portfolio' or multistrand career, and ran three events – the first on why you might want such a career, at least for a while (or how academia means you already have one); the second on how to optimise and manage its constituent parts; and the third featuring a panel of successful portfolio careerists and break-out sessions to explore practical challenges. I also organised IT sessions on how to get a personal website up and running, and how online presence and research impact intersect.

**The life of the mind and the body.** An intensive workshop on **How to Give a Knockout Presentation** emphasised the role of eye contact, posture, and hand gestures alongside the content and verbal style of a conference talk or lecture. A series of **Brain Training** breakfasts introduced the fundamentals of memory, analytical thinking, and creative thinking. A **Stress-Free Living** taster session offered new perspectives on stress and tuition on simple meditation and relaxation techniques, and a **Body Awareness** workshop combined yoga and pilates to help bring people back into their bodies.

*Continued on next page*

## FEATURED PROFILE CONTINUED

**Academic community-building.** Unlike the other events, regular early-career lunches with ultra-short talks struggled to attract reliable attendance. We need to explore the kinds of social events people want the Division to provide, if any.

The last event I ran combined all these elements, and attracted participants from across all four Divisions. The event was titled **Overcoming a Sense of Academic Failure**, and in it, seven speakers with successful careers within or beyond academia spoke openly, in small groups, about their failures (objective and subjective) and their ways of making peace with them. The most fundamental point of the event was that failure is inevitable and good, but feeling like a failure is neither. Download the resulting document at: <http://torch.ox.ac.uk/overcoming-sense-academic-failure-0>.

In short, I tried a lot of things, and most of them seemed to be really appreciated. There's a lot more I'd like to do, but I ran out of time. (At the same time as all this, I was attempting to write papers and grants on how fiction-reading may affect mental health, and a book on the mystery of consciousness.) Looking back on the year, it seems clear to me that people at this exciting but often precarious point in their careers could benefit a great deal from a reliable, tailored support scheme covering the full spectrum from basic academic skills training to welfare and wellbeing. To make this work well, we need to strengthen the links between the four Divisional training teams, the Learning Institute, the Counselling Service, and of course OxRSS. I look forward to seeing what happens next.

## NEWS FROM YOUR DIVISIONAL REPS

### MPLS

Dr Justin Hutchence, MPLS Researcher Training and Development Manager, continues to build on the [skills training and resources](#) for researchers. If you are interested in becoming an OxRSS MPLS Voice representative, please contact Anna: [anna.chabokdast@zoo.ox.ac.uk](mailto:anna.chabokdast@zoo.ox.ac.uk)

### Humanities

Dr Emily Troscianko, Humanities Postdoctoral Training Coordinator, has stepped down from her role and her replacement will soon be in post. OxRSS would like to thank Emily for all her efforts in creating a Humanities postdoc network, organising training and wellbeing events, and bootcamps for writing.

### Social Sciences

Researchers in the archaeology department have created a postdoc society and are planning activities for the upcoming year. We are keen to recruit additional OxRSS Voice representatives

from the Social Sciences. Please contact Anna if interested: [anna.chabokdast@zoo.ox.ac.uk](mailto:anna.chabokdast@zoo.ox.ac.uk).

### Medical Sciences

Professor Afsie Sabokbar has been appointed Divisional Director of Skills Training and Researcher Development for Medical Sciences. Her aims for the year are: 1) to establish the divisional Research Staff Advisory Group, which will include OxRSS representatives, 2) to discuss common issues, and 3) to create a list of training events/workshops, as well as, opportunities in entrepreneurship and innovation that can be easily accessed by research staff. Together with OxRSS, she would like to organise an annual event to celebrate the successes of Medical Sciences researchers with presentations from eminent speakers, and the opportunity to network with a variety of Oxford-based companies. If you are interested in becoming an OxRSS Medical Sciences Voice representative, please contact Claire on [Claire.pearson@kennedy.ox.ac.uk](mailto:Claire.pearson@kennedy.ox.ac.uk).

## FEATURED EVENTS

### Ashmolean Live Friday



On September 9th, OxRSS members attended a Live Friday event hosted by the Ashmolean Museum. In celebration of the 'Storm, Wars, and Shipwrecks' exhibition, the themes were 'Under the Sea', storms, and the sea in general.

The event featured lectures on 'Shakespeare's Storms' (Dr. Gwilym Jones), 'Shakespeare's Shipwrecks: Riots, Refugees and Restoration' (Prof. Ben Morgan), mural-making, performances by the Creation theatre about love-struck sailors and other matters, a drama workshop, and masks.

Among other names of the evenings were Dr. Mark Carnall (present for giving the lecture 'Cephalopods are brilliant'), Prof. Thomas F. Thornton (there to speak about 'Food webs and forage fish'), the storyteller Lucy Walters (reminiscing about how a land was lost to the

### Oxford Walking Tour

On July 23rd, OxRSS hosted a private walking tour of Oxford for society members and their friends and families. The tour was led by professional guide, Danièle Lucas, and lasted about two hours. It started at the Martyrs Memorial on St Giles, covered many of the historical buildings in the centre of Oxford, and ended with Merton College. We even had the opportunity to enter Merton College and visit the chapel.



sea), Marta Arnaldi (with her poems that were "interpreted into dance", as the written programme of the events mentioned), and Ludovico Einaudi (through his music that accompanied Arnaldi's poems translated into English). Dr. Paul Roberts, the curator of the exhibition that organised these happenings, was also present.

The atmosphere in the Ashmolean Museum is different at night time and definitely worth experiencing. There were plenty of attendees who made effort to come in fancy dress; we saw bellydancing mermaids and sea creatures, and a guitar strumming and singing pirate. We joined in a Ceilidh, and listened to a tale of love below the sea. The experience was rich, and we are looking forward to having more of you join us at future Live Friday events.

Our highly experienced and knowledgeable guide told us about the history of each of the buildings, as well as about the notable politicians, scientists, and other celebrities who were students of the various colleges. If you would like to pick up some priceless Oxford trivia or explore the historical buildings, please join us on our next walking tour that will hopefully happen in mid-October!

## USEFUL LINKS

### Career development, workshops, fairs and personal development

#### [Careers Service](#)

For one-on-one meetings with a Careers Adviser, and workshops and events specific for research staff.

#### [Code of Practice for the Employment and Career Development of Research Staff](#)

The University's commitment to supporting the careers of researchers.

#### [Research staff groups by department](#)

This website contains information on research staff groups in each department.

#### [Oxford Learning Institute](#)

Obtain support for personal and professional development via courses and seminars on management, teaching, and personal development.

#### [Support for researchers](#)

This website contains information on support available to research staff from across the University.

#### [Vitae](#)

The national researcher development organisation.

### Other resources

#### [IT services](#)

For technological and computing assistance

#### [New research staff](#)

This website provides information for research staff who recently joined Oxford.

### Social opportunities

#### [Oxford University Club](#)

Members and staff of the University are welcome to this sports and social Club.

#### [Facebook](#)

Like the [OxRss page](#) for the latest news and events!

#### [OxRSS Email List](#)

To join, please visit [www.oxrss.ox.ac.uk](http://www.oxrss.ox.ac.uk) and click the link "Sign up to the Research Staff Mailing List"

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