



# A Strategy for the Faculty of Law

## Shared Ambitions



March 2024



# MISSION

The Oxford Law Faculty pursues excellence in the teaching of, and research into, law. We do so as a cooperative venture, aligning the efforts of multiple organisations and individuals under the aegis of the University and Colleges. This means that our ambitions must be shared to be attainable. This strategy is intended to serve as a high-level framework for articulating our ambitions for the next five years. It has been developed through repeated discussion and conversations with stakeholders.

## Mission

The Law Faculty's 'mission' is a specific version of the more general mission of the University, namely 'the advancement of learning [in law and cognate disciplines] by teaching and research and its dissemination by every means.'

The Law Faculty is a unit of Oxford University, within the context of a collegiate environment. Our activities involve cooperation with the colleges, with which our academic personnel have joint appointments. Undergraduate teaching and pastoral support is skewed toward colleges, whereas graduate teaching and supervision skew more towards the Faculty. As compared with a non-collegiate university, the institutional environment brings additional resources and networks, but also means that there is little scope for hierarchy within the University structure. The Faculty's activities are therefore pursued through cooperative relations with its stakeholders.



# VALUES

## Values

These four values are internalised in our community and embedded in our institutional environment.

### EXCELLENCE

Our Faculty community is committed to the pursuit of excellence. Our University and Faculty are amongst world's best, reflecting the efforts and capabilities of our people.

### LEADERSHIP

We educate future leaders, as reflected in the significance of our alumni in the judiciary, Parliament, the legal profession, regulatory bodies, corporate boardrooms, academia worldwide and other influential roles. Our particular approach to pedagogy focuses on the contestation of ideas, encouraging students to take responsibility for their own analyses.

### ACADEMIC FREEDOM

The decentralised, non-hierarchical, nature of our institutional environment means that academics enjoy, and cherish, an unusually high degree of autonomy. Although academic freedom appears threatened in many contexts worldwide, it is part of the foundations of the Oxford environment.

### OPPORTUNITY

We are committed to creating opportunities for the fulfilment of outstanding potential. Concomitant to this, we develop initiatives to support individuals with characteristics meaning that their potential may have been historically undervalued.

# STRATEGIC INITIATIVES: SHARED AMBITIONS

The Law Faculty's strategic initiatives for the next five years are grouped under **six** themes.

**1. Investing in people.** Our people are our greatest asset. We should work to ensure that our staff feel supported, enabled, and appropriately rewarded within their roles. This builds on the clear identification of our people, and the reputation they steward, as our greatest strengths. We should ensure that we invest in our people commensurately with their importance to us.

The University currently has a number of relevant initiatives under way, including the Vice-Chancellor's [Pay and Conditions Report](#) and the [Professional Services Review](#). We are engaging with these initiatives to ensure that Law Faculty's perspective is clearly articulated. Once they are completed, it will be appropriate to consider in the round how they pertain to the Law Faculty and the extent to which further local changes are desirable within the framework they establish. Besides investing in people through pay and working conditions, we should also work to provide a more explicit set of opportunities for their career development. In particular, we should invest in a more comprehensive mentoring scheme, and identify improved ways to facilitate the pursuit of relevant training opportunities.



**2. Embracing the changing world.** We should seek to build on our strengths in relation to research and teaching to take advantage of the opportunities presented by global challenges, and to mitigate threats posed by external volatility and technological change in the form of generative AI.



A response to external volatility is to seek to embed a range of partnerships with other organisations, which can relate to teaching, research, or both. By diversifying the range of partnerships, and partnering with the right organisations, we are able to manage the risk associated with external events. We will establish a new role of Associate Dean for External Relations, who will develop and maintain a strategy for external partnerships, including processes for assessing both our target partnerships and bids from elsewhere.

Our current and potential portfolio of course offerings can be updated to embrace the changing world. Distinct drivers here include the impact technology is having on the professional world of work, and the legal sector specifically; the way in which global challenges are impacting student demand; and the very traditional nature of our undergraduate programme. We are launching a review of our undergraduate programme in HT24, with guidance from the Social Sciences Division, whose expertise and resources can assist in conducting the review. Looking forwards, we will explore potential for new interdisciplinary courses, especially at masters' level, which engage directly with global challenges. We will also seek to ensure that our Research Methods offerings for research students continue to be cutting-edge. Our new Executive Education programme will draw on research findings and established teaching expertise to deliver insights to a new and broader range of professional students.

The high social significance of global challenges means that work engaging with them is likely to be of interest to philanthropists and foundations, as well as featuring on the priorities of Research Councils and other public funders. This should be reflected in the narratives we develop for external communication of our research activity.

**3. Capitalising on research.** We should seek to capitalise on the strengths of our research environment by ensuring that the benefits of, and engagement with, our research environment are more evenly spread across colleagues working in the Faculty. At the same time, we should seek to increase further the overall quality and scale of our research enterprise, and to foster a more consistent approach to research culture.



We should seek to make more use of opportunities for research funding, which enables colleagues to leverage their research capacity. The Faculty has recently invested in a significant increase in research support capacity, which will enable us better to support colleagues' needs in this respect.

We are reflecting on the organisation of our research activity, encompassing Research Centres and Research Groups. Our new Research Group structure appears generally well-received, although there is considerable local variation in activities. We are reviewing Research Groups' operation to agree principles for future scope and activity. Alongside, we are also reviewing governance arrangements of Research Centre finances in order to facilitate collaboration and streamline administration to enable Centres to function as effectively as possible.

We should strive for greater consistency in the quality of our research culture across the Faculty. Relevant steps include fostering mentoring; working to reintroduce cross-Faculty seminars; facilitating informal get-togethers to share ideas; continuing work to promote equality, diversity and inclusion; and reflecting on procedures for selecting and engaging with research visitors. We might also do more to build expectations around colleagues' engagement with each other's work.

Doctoral students and early-career researchers are the academic leaders of tomorrow. The scale of our activity—the largest law doctoral programme in the common law world—gives us a disproportionate influence on the global future of our discipline. We must steward this future by nurturing and inspiring these cohorts. We should continue financial support for PGR students, enhance career development support and teaching opportunities for PGRs, and develop an action plan for employment conditions, environment, and support offered to ECRs/FTRs.

We are preparing early to ensure success in REF29 in accordance with the recommendations of the Faculty's REF21 Review. We have already appointed our REF Coordinators, who will be supported by our new Research Communications and Strategy Officer and the Divisional Research Impact Facilitator scheme. The initiatives described above mean that our REF preparation will follow from, rather than lead, Faculty strategy as respects research.

**4. Fulfilling outstanding potential.** Our commitment to the pursuit of excellence means we work together to ensure that all in our community are able to attain their academic potential, regardless of their non-academic characteristics. Our approach to understanding the impact of barriers and designing interventions to overcome them should be data-led. This theme spans a number of areas of activity sometimes thought about separately, but are united by a common aspiration.



We should continue our commitment to support work to foster access to our UG programme, and to work with University leads on the [Astrophoria Foundation Year](#) to help develop this as an effective intellectual springboard. We should continue our significant investment in supporting PGR students, associated with growing diversity in the cohort and greater representation of the global South. We should also consider initiatives to promote access for PGT programmes.

We recently overhauled selection processes for UG admissions, to ensure consistency and strengthen criteria by which we select for potential. We should enhance our data science support capacity within the Faculty for this and similar processes. We can then support data-led enquiry across a range of factors relevant to the achievement of potential, including seeking to identify any gender- and race-based attainment gaps and interventions to address them as appropriate, and to assist students in progression to employment.

We should build on the considerable strides we have made in equality, diversity and inclusion in recent years. In relation to gender equality, we will ensure we are well-prepared for renewal of our Athena Swan Certificate in 2026-27. We should also develop a proposal for paternity leave, shown in other employment contexts to be a driver toward gender equality. As regards race equality, we should continue to progress the Faculty's Race Equality Action Plan endorsed by Law Board in Trinity Term 2020.

We should also work to improve further our provision for disabled members of our community, in particular to introduce a ground-floor wheelchair-accessible entrance to the Faculty and improve awareness of visual impairments and associated support.

The pandemic experience had a sustained adverse impact on the wellbeing and mental health of many. The University has led investment in additional resources for support, and introduced new frameworks for both student and staff support, which we are implementing.

**5. Enhancing facilitation and support.** The Faculty's central function is to facilitate and support cooperative activities. Yet our capacity to do so is smaller in scale than comparable departments and hindered by lack of physical space. We should invest in growing our overall PSS capacity, improving our built environment, and taking advantage of the opportunities presented by digital transformation to enhance our technological environment in ways that facilitate our activities.



*People.* Following changes in recruitment protocols, we can now increase our professional services staff (PSS) capacity provided this is sustainably affordable. We will prioritize areas in which capacity is most overstretched, including HR and Events support, and implement other measures to mitigate workload issues in the team. When planning new activity, we should ensure full costing of additional administrative requirements. We will do more to facilitate training and staff development for PSS, including engaging effectively with the University's Professional Services Together framework and other associated initiatives.

*Space.* There is potential for a transformative increase in the Law Faculty's space when the English Faculty moves out of the St Cross Building at the end of 2025. Our proposal will centre around an interaction hub, with an eatery surrounded by semi-open rooms offering linked spaces where staff and students can engage in both social and professional interactions. We envision flexible desk space for research project teams, research students, visitors, and colleagues wanting to work in the building; seminar and meeting spaces for teaching and research interactions; and larger teaching rooms including a moot court. Alongside, digital infrastructure will facilitate efficient real-time space booking and indexing locations.

*Digital Transformation.* Technology has enormous potential to enhance many things we do, especially given the way in which colleagues are spread across colleges. Digital transformation means thinking holistically about data, technical systems, and the people that use them. We should seek to engage as effectively as possible with the University's Digital Transformation initiative, in conjunction with local reforms to relevant data storage, processes, systems, and training. We should not underestimate the size of the effort, or the scale of the benefits obtainable.

*Governance.* Changes in the external environment, coupled our ambitions, imply need for changes to our governance. We have already focused agenda-setting in PRC and Law Board and added additional PRC strategy meetings. The Digital Transformation agenda will likely necessitate further governance reform.

**6. Financial sustainability.** We should grow resources in order to fund the ambitions outlined above. We should develop a medium-term financial plan that identifies plausible sources of revenue that follow from academic priorities identified elsewhere, and sequences activity such that income generation clearly precedes increases in recurring expenditure commitments.



However, we should not pursue activity simply because it is revenue-generating. We should identify activities that are both consistent with our academic ambitions but which are also likely to generate net revenues. We will also engage in process reviews to determine more efficient ways of allocating resources, with a view to reducing overall costs.

We have a new Development team, embedded in the University's Development Office. This gives access to additional resources to support activities. In particular, the new team bring with them experience of working with high net worth individuals, a group we have not traditionally pursued. We are working to launch a development campaign resonating with both the University's fundraising and the ambitions we have articulated for our Faculty.

