



Five-Year Strategic Plan

October 2023 – July 2028



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Introduction

The Nuffield Department of Women's & Reproductive Health (WRH) was established in 1937, with John Chassar Moir as the first Nuffield Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. Today we have around 200 members including academic and research staff, clinicians, research support staff, professional staff and graduate students. Our department sits within the Medical Sciences Division, which is an internationally recognised centre of excellence for biomedical and clinical research and teaching, and the largest of the four academic divisions within the University of Oxford.

Where we work

Our clinical and laboratory-based research and teaching programmes are based mainly in the Women's Centre, at the John Radcliffe Hospital site, and the Institute of Reproductive Sciences (IRS), Oxford Business Park North. Additional sites where WRH groups are located are Begbroke Science Park, the Big Data Institute, the Weatherall Institute of Molecular Medicine, and the Wellcome Centre for Human Genetics.

The department's main offices are on Level 3 of the Women's Centre (John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford), which is responsible for the care of over 7,000 pregnant women and over 7,500 new gynaecology patients per year. The hospital is a tertiary referral centre for obstetric medicine, pre-natal diagnosis, endometriosis, reproductive medicine, IVF, urogynaecology and gynaecological oncology.

Research

WRH conducts its multi-disciplinary research across five themes: Cancer; Global Health; Maternal and Fetal Health; Reproductive Medicine and Genetics; and a Data Science cross-theme. Groups within each theme have built up extensive collaborations over the years. From 2023/24 onwards, we will have dedicated leads for each of the themes who will be responsible for strategy implementation. This implementation will include an activity central to our strategy - building further collaborations within WRH, the University, OUHFT, and externally, to deliver on our strategic goals.

Cancer

Theme Lead: Karin Hellner

Scientific Coordinator Lead: Mara Artibani

Our Cancer research covers the following research groups: Cervical Neoplasia (Karin Hellner); Nanoparticles in Cancer (Helen Townley) and Ovarian Cancer (Ahmed Ahmed/Chris Yau). Visiting Professors Lucy Dorrell (ImmunoCore) and Sean Kehoe (OUHFT) support the Cervical Neoplasia and Ovarian Cancer programmes, respectively.

Global Health

Theme Lead: Aris Papageorgiou

Scientific Coordinator Lead: Nicole Votruba

Our Global Health research covers the following research groups: Cardiovascular disease/Multimorbidity (Kazem Rahimi); the Oxford Maternal & Perinatal Health Institute (OMPHI), (Stephen Kennedy/Aris Papageorgiou/Jose Villar); ME/CFS, Long Covid and Long Lyme disease (Karl Morten); Women's Mental Health (Nicole Votruba). Visiting Professor Jane Hirst (Imperial College London) supports the Global Health and Maternal & Fetal Health research programmes in WRH.

Maternal & Fetal Health

Theme Lead: Fadil Hannan

Scientific Coordinator Lead: Reza Soltaninejad

Our Maternal & Fetal Health research covers the following research groups: Human lactation (Fadil Hannan), Intelligent Imaging in Fetal Health (Aris Papageorgiou), Oxford Labour Monitoring (Antoniya Georgieva), Placental Imaging (Sally Collins), and Pre-eclampsia/Gestational Diabetes/Antenatal CTG monitoring (Manu Vatish). Visiting Professor Jane Hirst supports the Global Health and Maternal & Fetal Health research programmes in WRH. Emeritus Professor Chris Redman supports the Antenatal CTG monitoring research programme (Dawes-Redman).

Reproductive Medicine & Genetics

Theme Lead: Suzannah Williams

Scientific Coordinator Lead: Lydia Coxon

Our Reproductive Medicine & Genetics research covers the following research groups: Assisted Reproductive Technology (Dagan Wells); Endometriosis/Adenomyosis/Uterine Fibroids (Christian Becker/Jen Southcombe/Krina Zondervan); Oocytes and Ovarian Biology/Female Fertility Preservation (Suzannah Williams); Recurrent Miscarriage (Ingrid Granne/Jen Southcombe); Pain in Women (Katy Vincent); Mitochondrial Genetics (Jo Poulton) and Sperm Biology/Male Fertility Preservation (Kevin Coward).

Data Science

Theme Lead: Kazem Rahimi

Scientific Coordinator Lead: Yi Yin

Data science is a cross-theme that straddles all four research pillars/themes and covers the following research groups: AI/Machine learning in molecular medicine (Chris Yau); Deep Medicine (Kazem Rahimi); Digital Phenotyping (Chris Nellåker); Epidemiology, Genomics, and Multi-omics (Krina Zondervan, Katy Vincent); AI in placental imaging (Sally Collins) and ultrasound imaging (Aris Papageorgiou); AI in antenatal (Gabriel Jones/Manu Vatish) and labour CTG monitoring (Antoniya Georgieva). Honorary Senior Research Fellow Cecilia Lindgren (BDI/NDPH) supports various programmes including digital phenotyping.

Teaching

A core activity of WRH is education and training. We are responsible for developing and delivering innovative undergraduate teaching in women's and reproductive health in the Medical School curriculum. In 2008, we established the MSc Course in Clinical Embryology, a world-class course that has won numerous University awards for teaching innovation and excellence. We host two research degree programmes in women's and reproductive health – an MSc by Research (2-year) and a DPhil (3 year full-time or 6-year part-time). New scholarships will be introduced from 2024/25 for both DPhil and MSc students, with further details published at the end of 2023/24.

Governance 2018 to present day

In 2018/19, WRH piloted a new leadership model, outlined in **Appendix 1 - Leadership Framework Structure 2023/24**. The model has been running for five years and has been well received. It is designed to provide transparency in decision-making and topics discussed feed into the strategy for the department. It consists of four main working groups; the Executive Team (ET), the Research Working Group (RWG), the Education Working Group (EWG) and the People & Resources Working Group (PRWG). The last three groups report into the ET. Membership comes from a cross-section of the department, including a majority of PIs and Professional Services and now students. Subgroups provide the opportunity for junior clinicians and researchers to gain practical leadership experience through the Athena SWAN Development Working Group (ASDWG).

Each working group meets on a termly basis. Membership to the leadership framework is refreshed every two to three years, and members are rotated through the groups. Minutes and agendas are published on the department's intranet, called the Hub. The Professional Services Team clerk the meetings, and coordinators are trained in minute writing for consistency.

Governance from Autumn 2023/24 onwards

Moving forward, the leadership model will continue to evolve, and from 2023, will include representation of students on each of the main working groups.

While WRH has categorised its research on its website into four pillars/themes for a number of years, feedback from PI away days showed that there was a lack of knowledge what research was being conducted both within and between themes, and that opportunities for increased cohesion, collaboration, and joined-up strategic thinking were being missed. Theme days that were organised in 2022/23 resulted in much enthusiasm for increased collaboration, and in new grant applications being submitted and funded. Further, it was clear that Data Science is a strength and strategic area of growth in the department that spans research groups across themes (in 2022 a new Professor of Artificial Intelligence was appointed in a joint post between WRH/NDPH/BDI); Data Science was therefore added as a fifth (cross-)theme.

As described above, PI and Coordinator leads were appointed for each theme, tasked with organising theme events moving forward. Terms of reference for each of the themes are available upon request. Theme Leads will be appointed for three years; in the first instance, the theme will form a working group and report to the Research Working Group on a termly basis.

Strategy 2018/19 to 2022/23

The department developed its first shared strategy in the summer of 2018, which was distributed within the department at the beginning of the new academic year 2018/19. The department's strategy mirrored the University's by keeping in line with time period covered and terminology. The strategy was rolled out through the leadership framework, with the above-described working groups responsible for implementing the strategy through the mainly SMART priorities¹. Minutes and agendas provide evidence of completed work, and outstanding items were easily identifiable.

The percentage of the strategy that was accomplished by 2023 was 70%. The total number of months to complete the strategy was 60 however, 22 months were lost to disruption due to the pandemic (equating to 36% of lost time). Achieving 70% of the strategy in a demanding and tumultuous period should be considered a good realisation. **Appendix 2 - Strategy Completion Rate 2018/19 to 2022/23** provides the total number of priorities by working group and the completion rate.

Strategy 2023/24 to 2027/28

In August 2022, the Government published the **Women's Health Strategy for England**, which recognised that women spend a greater proportion of their lives in ill health and disability compared to men. While there is insufficient focus on women-specific conditions and issues like gynaecological morbidity, maternal health, miscarriage or menopause, women have historically also been underrepresented in clinical trials for major public health morbidities such as cardiovascular disease or cancer, leading to insufficient knowledge about conditions that affect men and women in different ways.

The Government of England's first strategy for women's health **calls for a life course approach** to the changing health and care needs of women and girls across their lives from adolescents to young adults and later life. The department's current research themes and scientific strengths cover many of the areas of research focussed on within the Government's strategy, while also identifying gaps that provide a focus for strategic growth – such as women's mental health, and menopause.

Considerable opportunities also exist for the continued development of our excellent teaching programme. Our acclaimed Undergraduate and MSc in Clinical Embryology courses continue to evolve, while there is clear enthusiasm within the University and MSD to develop further taught MSc courses in areas of strength expertise. Development of two additional multidisciplinary MSc degree courses, in Global Women's Health and Reproductive Genetics, are strategic priorities for the department.

Our new strategy aims to support existing and developing excellence in research and teaching in our department and build opportunities for growth. It aims to be ambitious, comprehensive, and inclusive, reaching all areas of the Department's business.

Scope

The Women's and Reproductive Health (WRH) Strategic Plan sets out priorities for the department from 2023/24 to 2027/28. Staff and students were consulted during the drafting

¹ Specific, measurable, attributable, relevant, timely

of the plan. The plan is underpinned by more detailed implementation plans, including the Athena Swan Action Plan². It is a live document available to all departmental stakeholders.

A key new policy that impacts various elements of the new strategy is the University's Finance White Paper (white paper), which aims to increase transparency, improve decision making, align governance with financial responsibility, and provide better financial incentives to increase both income and value for money, while promoting more informed investment in the University's academic future. Further information on the White Paper is available [here](#).

Vision Statement

Our vision is a world in which there is access to high quality, evidence-based women's and reproductive health(care) for all.

Mission Statement

Our mission is to advance women's and reproductive health through research and teaching and to improve the quality and delivery of women's healthcare across the globe.³

Gender Equality Statement

We acknowledge that not everyone designated female at birth considers themselves to be a woman and that many of the issues researched within our department can be particularly challenging for these people. However, for the purposes of clarity and to align with the Government Strategy we continue to use these terms in statements such as these. Research undertaken within the department is, however, inclusive and aims to be relevant to the diverse population.

² Implementation Plans are now available for each of the working groups in Asana

³ A Mission statement should:

- define our purpose and primary objectives
- explain why we exist, both to NDWRH members and externals
- be short, clear and powerful (in present tense)

The University's Mission Statement is:

The advancement of learning by teaching and research and its dissemination by every means

Research

The Nuffield Department of Women's & Reproductive Health (WRH) houses some of the best researchers in the world in the field. The breadth of our research and extensive network of partnerships and collaborations helps drive advancements in knowledge, understanding and innovation. The department's worldwide acclaimed research covers the full spectrum of women's health and features four main themes: Cancer, Global Health, Maternal & Fetal Health, Reproductive Medicine & Genetics, and a cross-theme, Data Science.

Commitments and Priorities for the Research Working Group (RWG)

Commitment 1: To build and enable ambitious, world-leading, pioneering research of exceptional quality in the field of WRH.

We will undertake ambitious research to the highest standards of rigour, ethics, and governance, which continuously pushes the boundaries of knowledge development, technological advances, and clinical/population-based application, and which has the potential to create the greatest impact on the health of women and girls globally.

We will provide our researchers with the freedom to investigate problems of significance, whether their work be curiosity-driven or challenge-led. We will invest in our areas of strength and in new strategic priority areas through the recruitment of both early career and established group leaders, and through the provision of required infrastructures and facilities. The breadth and depth of WRH's interdisciplinary expertise enable us to contribute towards and lead the international research agenda across a wide range of disciplines in WRH, to convene multidisciplinary and (inter)national collaborative teams, and to address the most significant current global issues concerning WRH.

- 1.1 To contribute to the dialogue around new (women's mental health; menopause) and existing (data science; extracellular vesicle research; translational research) strategic priority research areas for 2023-28 and how best to support these, e.g., through planning of scientific collaborative events, seminar organisation, prioritisation of equipment needs.
- 1.2 Data Science is a clear strategic priority for the department. For the Theme Lead of Data Science to work across the four established pillars of science to develop a strong strategy from within the department to support high power computing.
- 1.3 To assist with the direction of the implement OpenSpecimen sample tracking software to manage sample movement and storage for all new research studies from the beginning of Michaelmas 2025.

Commitment 2: To invest in our people and infrastructure and support the wider research environment, thereby enabling our research endeavours to grow sustainably.

We will provide a stimulating, positive, collaborative environment and infrastructure for research for all our staff and students. For NDWRH to remain at the global forefront research and allow expansion into novel areas of clinical and scientific need, we will invest in training and support and ensure the wellbeing of our research community to attract the ablest minds from across the world to engage in our research; this is also duly reflected in our People & Resources Commitments.

- 2.1 To oversee the work undertaken by the Laboratory Working Group, as outlined in the Laboratory Implementation Plan, and for this to include:
 - Funding applications to replace old or new equipment above the value of £100k.
 - To conduct annual reviews of research groups' equipment needs, by the end of 2026
 - To provide a register of equipment 'super users' on the Lab Users Hub page.
- 2.2 To have oversight of the establishment of a departmental biobank by the end of Trinity 2024 to facilitate access to human samples, a common and easier mechanism for sample governance and updates to research ethics, and cost recovery from previously collected samples.
- 2.3 To have oversight over annual theme-based events organised by Theme Leads and Scientific Coordinators aimed at promoting knowledge exchange, encouraging collaboration and pursuit of joint funding opportunities, and stakeholder management; and for Scientific Coordinators to produce a bi-annual report on ROI based on any grants and emerging collaborative work that has come from these events.
- 2.4 To oversee the change programme outlined from the WRH Clinical Research Group (previously OSPREA) Review and ensure it runs to the agreed timeframe within 2023/24.
- 2.5 To receive a termly report from the department's Concordat representatives and to ensure that the work marries with the work of the Athena Swan Development Working Group.
- 2.6 To act as the Oversight Board for the work of the Athena Swan Development Working Group, receiving their recommendations for improvements to the department's offering to junior clinicians and Early Career Scientists, and, if agreed, to take key proposals to ET for ratification and implementation.
- 2.7 Working with the Theme Leads, Research Facilitator, Communications Manager, and volunteers to embed an annual Science Day within the department, starting Hilary 2024, with a baseline attendance of 100 and an annual attendance growth of 15% year on year until 2028⁴.

⁴ Budget to be agreed via submission of costs to the ET on an annual basis.

- 2.8 Working with the Director of Taught Programmes, to manage from Michaelmas 2025/26 onwards the annual communication around the projects for the MSc Clinical Embryology, MSc in Research Governance and MSc in Global Women's Health, so that students of those courses are ready and prepared to begin their work from Hilary 2026 onwards.

Commitment 3: To increase and diversify the research funding portfolio to ensure the ongoing growth and overall sustainability of the department in conducting and delivering world-class research.

In an ever-more challenging funding environment, current and new funding opportunities will be explored for WRH to remain at the international forefront of WRH research; this requires analysis of the current funding streams, and their future funding levels/priorities, as well as analysis of potential new funding opportunities. The general and specific needs of PIs in terms of support in applying for funding will need to be assessed, and once identified, implemented.

- 3.1 To continue to engage and build relationships with commercial, NGO and other funders, to grow the value of non-public-sector-funded research to a total of £4 million p/a by the end of Trinity 2024/25.
- 3.2 To diversify and build our portfolio of commercial funding to increase the department's overhead recovery rate to 25% by the end of 2025/26.
- 3.3 To have oversight of the development of a PI alert system for WRH-relevant grant call openings and deadlines by the Research Facilitator, working with the Grants Manager, to be set up by Trinity 2024.
- 3.4 To lead, working together with MSD REF leads, on ensuring that the department is ready for the submission for the REF by the end of 2027. To be responsible for preparing any pre-documents and liaising with the department to ensure clear communications and deadlines are met. To ensure a strategy for cross-departmental compliance with Act on Acceptance submissions through Symplectic. To report regularly to the ET on any matters related to the submission.

REF Background

The next REF submission is due Michaelmas 2027, with the conclusion due some time in 2028. The REF 2028 will have an expanded definition of research excellence. The three elements familiar from REF 2014 and REF 2021 have been renamed, their content adjusted, and their weightings rebalanced to reflect this:

- People, culture, and environment (25% weighting) replaces the environment element and will be expanded to include research culture.

- Contribution to knowledge and understanding (50% weighting) replaces the outputs element. It will largely be based on assessment of research outputs, but will also include evidence of broader contributions to the advancement of the discipline.
- Engagement and impact (25% weighting) replace the impact element. It is similar to the impact element of REF 2014 and will consist of impact case studies and an accompanying statement.
- REF 2028 will move further away from the assessment of individuals. There will be a new approach to determining research volume, where the number of staff with significant responsibility for research is drawn directly from the HESA staff record. The volume measure will be based on the average number of staff over a number of years
- In REF 2028 there will be no minimum of maximum number of outputs contributed by an individual. This is intended to increase inclusivity of the assessment and provide an environment which is supportive of researchers establishing themselves or moving into academia.
- The University and MSD is putting management and advisory structures in place to help departments prepare for REF 2028 in plenty of time.

Commitment 4: To maximise the public benefit deriving from our research at the regional, national, and international level.

We will continue to ensure that our research not only benefits our researchers and immediate stakeholders but that it continues to provide a significant contribution towards improving health outcomes and the discovery of innovative treatments for complex health problems at local and global levels. We will continue to build NDWRH's 'public face', including outreach to media, social networks, patient groups, and the public at large.

- 4.1 As part of the RWG, for the Theme Leads to contribute to the collaborative culture, and the overall scientific learning and development of the department, by providing one seminar each term starting from Hilary Term 2024 to the Seminar Lead and to agree these specific themes through the ET, ensuring they also meet education requirements.
- 4.2 Working with the Theme Leads and Coordinators, for the Communications Manager to review the departmental website for up-to-date descriptions of ongoing research, ensuring representation of honorary members of the department. First update to be made in Michaelmas 2023.
- 4.3 Working with the Theme Scientific Coordinators, for the Communications Manager to develop a robust strategy for public engagement and outreach by the end of 2023/24, with a presentation to PRWG in Hilary 2024 and to the ET in Trinity 2024.
- 4.4 To agree and establish a baseline metric in participation in outreach and public engagement by the end of 2023/24 for each scientific theme and then to increase

participation in outreach and public engagement work by 10% (on 2023/24 levels) year on year by the end of 2027/28.

- 4.5 To have oversight for the publication of the Annual Report at the beginning of each academic year from 2024/25 and its content. Working with the Theme Leads, the Research Facilitator and department's Communication Manager, to agree the scientific content, establish meaningful metrics and ensure it reflects the work of the department and communicates key messages to stakeholders.
- 4.6 For the Research Facilitator to review MSD's Information Asset policy and update the department's Information Asset Register with datasets held in NDWRH, asset ownership/responsible PIs, and relevant and required record keeping under UK GDPR. For this information to be presented on a termly basis to the RWG.
- 4.7 To explore the embedding of the WRH Clinical Research Group (WRH-CRG, formerly OSPREA) into a CTU such as NPEU or OCDEM by 2026/27, using principles of mutual benefit, in order to better facilitate and accommodate clinical trials in WRH.
- 4.8 To set up a language inclusivity working group for clinical trials by the end of Hilary 2024, in order to carry on previously completed work looking into the serious disparity in this area.

Education

Undergraduate Teaching

Women's and Reproductive Health is a core subject in the fifth year of the Medical School curriculum. Therefore, the provision of high quality and innovative teaching for clinical medical students is a departmental priority. Six groups of 24-28 students a year attend a two-week taught course, followed by five weeks of clinical work in one of six hospitals, and finish with a week of revision and assessment.

Postgraduate Teaching

The department offers two postgraduate research programmes: a two-year MSc by Research and a three-year DPhil. These involve undertaking independent research in their chosen area under the supervision of two or more experts in their field.

It also offers a taught MSc in Clinical Embryology. This one year, residential, MSc aims to provide graduate students, scientists, and clinicians with highly advanced theoretical and practical understanding of human reproductive biology, embryology, infertility and assisted reproductive technology (ART) along with intensive 'hands-on' practical training in essential laboratory skills and the sophisticated gamete micromanipulation techniques associated with ART.

Commitments and Priorities for the Education Working Group (EWG)

Commitment 1: To attract, admit and support students with outstanding academic potential, from all backgrounds.

As we continue to strive to be a world-leading centre in women's and reproductive health, education in this area is a vital pillar in the department's strategy. We are committed to attracting the very best students to train with us, and become future leading clinicians, scientists, and lecturers in the field.

It is our intention to continually grow and improve our offering to our students, and to monitor the impact of those enhancements to validate their impact.

- 1.1 From Trinity 2024, to develop a self-assessment questionnaire to establish a baseline understanding of all PGR students' skills including:
 - IT skills
 - laboratory skills
 - core theoretical knowledge of research area
 - oral and written communication skills

For the questionnaire to be used for the first time in Michaelmas 2024.

- 1.2 To pilot a student induction or 'Freshers Week' during 2023-24 as a means to increase student participation within the department, with monitoring and feedback mechanisms put in place by the EWG throughout the year.

- 1.3 For student representation to be included on each of the Leadership Working Groups from Michaelmas 2023 in order to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion, and to provide a richer learning experience for the students, and to undertake a survey at the end of Trinity 2024 to gain insight into the student experience.
- 1.4 Working with HR, to offer a formal voluntary exit interview for students leaving a course from Michaelmas 2023. The exit interview will be held by the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) and the Head of Administration and Finance (HAF) and information will be collated anonymously and fed back to the EWG on a termly basis (where applicable).

Commitment 2: To offer all our students the best teaching and research experience and ensure that we equip each with the knowledge to excel in their chosen field and be a global citizen.

We strive to support students in becoming experts in their field. This requires outstanding teaching and research facilities and opportunities, responding to rapidly growing and changing research areas. We will monitor students' needs to ensure we stay abreast of the skills and technologies they require in their field of study and to ensure they can acquire these.

We will continue to make the best use of the space we have, and, despite its limitations, will offer the best environment possible to our students; this includes providing the right equipment to carry out research, along with a supportive and stimulating environment and culture.

- 2.1 To formalise competency training on key laboratory equipment for all new students from Michaelmas 2023.
- 2.2 The Lab Manager and the Lab Working Group will develop a virtual Laboratory Handbook by the end of Michaelmas 2023, providing details of the equipment and facilities available in the department. The Handbook will be published on the Hub for ease of reference from Hilary 2024 onwards.
- 2.3 All new scientific starters to attend the University's ethical research core course as part of the induction process. Review new students' induction process by October 2024. From Michaelmas 2024, all students will be trained in the basic principles of good laboratory practice and research ethics.
- 2.4 In 2024/25 to offer three 'reduced rate' scholarships for DPhil students.
- 2.5 In 2024/25 to offer three scholarships for the MSc in Clinical Embryology:
 - Fully paid scholarship
 - Half paid scholarship
 - Bursary only

The offer of scholarships will be reviewed in subsequent years based on financial viability, which at present relies on an increase in annual recruitment of students by an average of 4.5. The additional 4.5 students are on top of the 24 students in the 2023-24 figures.

- 2.6 Working with the Communications Manager, to develop a comprehensive marketing plan for the scholarships and the marketing of the MSc in Clinical Embryology by the end of 2023-24 as a means for recruiting 30 students to the course (including the additional 4.5 students as agreed to meet the costs of the scholarship) for the 2024/25 academic year.
- 2.7 For the EWG to receive a review of the existing MSc in Clinical Embryology from the new Director of Clinical Embryology by the end of the academic year 2024/25 with any recommendations for change, and taking into consideration the new courses the department is developing and the economies of scale from using the same modules etc.
- 2.8 For the Theme Leads to contribute to the collaborative culture and the overall scientific learning and development of the department by providing one seminar each term starting from Hilary 2024, and to notify these specific themes to the Research and Education Working Groups and the Seminar Lead.⁵
- 2.9 To deliver a new part-time and full-time MSc in (Global) Women's Health, to commence October 2025/26, ensuring economies of scale with the other two courses (MScs in Reproductive Genetics and Clinical Embryology) where possible.
- 2.10 To ensure the delivery of a new part-time and full-time MSc in Reproductive Genetics, to commence October 2026/27, as part of a suite of three MSc courses in the department (Reproductive Genetics, Clinical Embryology and Global Women's Health).
- 2.11 To receive regular termly reports from the Seminar Lead on the attendance and participation in Departmental Seminars, including seminar subjects, participation rates, feedback etc., to help shape and determine future strategy.
- 2.12 For each academic year, to review the progress the EWG has made through Asana and provide an update report to the ET for its final meeting in Trinity.

Commitment 3: To continue to build departmental teaching, supervisory, and mentoring skills to ensure students receive the best possible support during their time with us.

Educating the leaders of the future in women's and reproductive health requires a supportive environment where students feel they can interact, discuss, and work with their supervisors and their team without barriers or impediments. We are committed to training and supporting our teachers and supervisors to ensure that they, in turn, can fully and effectively help students from a wide variety of backgrounds.

⁵ Please note this is duplicated in priorities under Research Working Group

- 3.1 To develop and promote a departmental recognition scheme for teaching excellence for implementation by 2025/26, learning from other departments' best practice.
- 3.2 Working with the HR team, to introduce a comprehensive 360-degree review for supervisors by 2025/26 to form part of the PDR with the Head of Department, and to include feedback from students, peers, professional services, etc.

People and Resources

We have over 200 people spread across eight sites in Oxford consisting of postgraduate students, research staff and professional staff. Our people are our lifeblood, and we are committed to ensuring they feel valued, nurtured and part of the WRH community. We want to develop strong working relationships while harnessing a positive and productive work culture through the recruitment, development, and retention of the right people.

As a relatively small department within the Medical Sciences Division, we must utilise our resources carefully to ensure we are building the correct infrastructure for our future. From our laboratory equipment and safety to ensuring up-to-date computer equipment, we must ensure that money is spent wisely and we are providing the best working environment we can for our people to thrive.

The department is committed to fulfilling its Athena Swan Action Plan.

Commitments and Priorities for the People & Resources Working Group (PRWG)

Commitment 1: To attract, recruit and retain the highest calibre staff.

We believe the recruitment process is fundamental to the department's success. The department commits to ensuring that a variety of tools are employed to support the process, from Value-Based Interviews (VBI) to psychometric testing (McQuaig and Flow®). We will use the best routes for advertising to attract suitable candidates. Our recruitment process will aim to introduce individuals to the department who not only have the skills and experience to fulfil a role, but also have the ambition and potential to drive NDWRH forward in meeting its strategic aims.

The department will provide clear and insightful inductions to ensure that its people understand the mission and vision and strategic direction. We will encourage open and transparent dialogue and through our Personal Development Plan (PDR) will seek to motivate, reward and retain our best people.

Retention will be strengthened through fair and transparent reward and a culture which demonstrates we value our people and wish to invest in them.

- 1.1 Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedure: to continue to build on the procedure implemented in 2022/23, ensuring that recruitment policy and practices are well embedded within the department, including ensuring key performance indicators are published on the Hub so that recruitment managers are clear what they can expect, within what time frames etc.
 - 1.1.1 For the HR Manager to report to the PRWG on the key performance indicators on a termly basis, outlining any issues and where improvements have been made to the service.

- 1.2 To introduce externally implemented exit interviews from Michaelmas 2023 to gain feedback from past employees to improve aspects of the organisation, and to begin reporting these to ET from Hilary 2024.
- For the HR Manager, where possible, to link any issues to relevant areas of the business and to create key metrics to measure improvements.
 - For the PRWG to monitor these issues through an Asana Dashboard and consider trends or patterns that may have longer term implications for the department, and report these to the ET.

Commitment 2: To invest in our people to ensure they reach their full potential.

We will ensure that each member of staff receives a regular bi-annual Personal Development Review (PDR) with their line manager, so they are clear about their objectives and how they link to the department's overall strategy.

We will actively facilitate mentoring and coaching for our people, incorporating divisional and WRH support schemes where appropriate. We recognise that life-long learning is a critical element of the workplace and will provide opportunities for agile learning and development for individuals and teams.

We will regularly review our processes and procedures to ensure they are in line with good practice, are equitable, fair and provide the best opportunities for our people to grow and mature.

- 2.1 To protect the department and all those visiting the department, particularly the young and vulnerable, by ensuring that the University's Safeguarding Policy is embedded throughout, and that training is provided to all staff on the policy and procedure by the end of Michaelmas 2023.
- 2.2 To formalise competency training on key laboratory equipment for all new lab-based staff from Michaelmas 2023.
- 2.3 To support the development of future research technicians via apprenticeships by developing a learning programme, in addition to their accredited course, to teach laboratory and safety management as well as research skills.
- 2.4 To ensure the behaviour framework is fully embedded into all of the department's policies and procedures, job descriptions and PDR processes, induction and departmental meetings, by the end of Trinity 2024, and evidenced through working examples provided in a report to the ET at its final meeting in Trinity 2024.
- 2.5 To review the PDR software used by the department and provide an alternative online system by the end of Hilary 2024, with full roll-out and training by the end of Trinity 2024.

- 2.6 To set the work of the Athena Swan Development Working Group from early Michaelmas onwards for the forthcoming year, ensuring that it works alongside the department's representatives of the Concordat, and that the outcomes are progressive yet sustainable for the department.
- 2.7 To appoint a WRH EDI Lead and develop an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy in line with the University EDI strategy by the end of Trinity 2025 and to embed it into the department by Trinity 2026. Ensure through a communications plan that EDI stays in the forefront of people's conscience, and that it is rooted through regular required training across the department.
- 2.8 Execute an Annual Strategy Workshop for the Leadership Framework Teams starting in Trinity 2024 as a way to evaluate each year's work and to establish any changing or developing priorities for the following year.
- 2.9 Establish a Senior Leadership Development Programme that complements the needs of individuals and the needs of the department, taking into consideration strategic priorities and succession planning, with a first outline provided to the ET by the beginning of Hilary 2024 and a final draft by Michaelmas 2025.
- 2.10 The department remains committed to the Athena Swan Charter and is intending to submit a gold application in July 2024. The PRWG will have oversight of the Athena Swan application to be submitted by July 2024, before sign-off from the ET.
- 2.11 Following submission, for the PRWG to ensure the Athena Swan Action Plan remains on course until its completion and the next submission, receiving regular termly updates from the HR Manager and through Asana.
- 2.12 To strengthen the department's processes and procedures related to Information Governance through an identified, dedicated person within the Professional Services Team to further develop this area and to maintain records related to asset management, information governance awareness, and training, from Hilary 2025.

Commitment 3: To ensure our premises provide an environment which enables world-class research and education whilst minimising our environmental impact and improving space utilisation.

- 3.1 As part of the department's Environmental Sustainability Strategy, to move finance and HR functions to paperless systems by the end of Trinity 2025.
- 3.2 For the Grants, Finance, HR, Laboratory and Facilities teams to develop a new risk register by the end of Trinity 2024, and for areas of this specific to each of the Leadership Working Groups to be adopted by Michaelmas 2024, and reviewed on a regular basis.

- 3.3 To create a designated secure liquid nitrogen storage room in the JR laboratories, with in built oxygen monitoring systems and updated SOPs and risk assessments, by the end of Michaelmas 2023.
- 3.4 To pursue the refurbishment of the Women's 3rd Floor Laboratory Space with the Medical Sciences Division, seeking to make improvements to existing space and upgrade the area by Michaelmas 2023.
 - 3.4.1 To pursue an alternative lab space strategy for the department through MSD, to allow the department to expand wet-lab areas and expand research groups, by the end of Trinity 2025.
 - 3.4.2 To seek out alternative space with other departments to house PI groups either in order to expand our research portfolio or provide greater flexibility to existing groups by the end of Trinity 2025.
 - 3.4.3 To set up a sub-group to improve the department's commitment to the University's Environmental Sustainability Strategy by Trinity 2024, led by the Laboratory Manager, and demonstrating a reduction in its carbon footprint by 15% by 2025, 20% by 2026, 25% by 2027, and 30% by 2028.
- 3.5 For the Laboratory Working Group to work towards the Laboratory Efficiency Assessment (LEAF) Gold Accreditation, and for this to include:
 - 3.5.1 Achieving a bronze LEAF award by Trinity 2024, a silver award by Trinity 2026 and a gold award by 2027.
 - 3.5.2 Establishing a communal chemical and reagent inventory to facilitate the sharing and reduce wastage by the end of Trinity 2024.
 - 3.5.3 Increasing opportunities for recycling in the laboratory by the end of Trinity 2024.
 - 3.5.4 Continuing with a program of replacing old equipment such as the biological safety cabinets with new energy-efficient models using funding from the Carbon Management Programme throughout the cycle of the strategy, with reports to the PRWG in Trinity of each academic year.

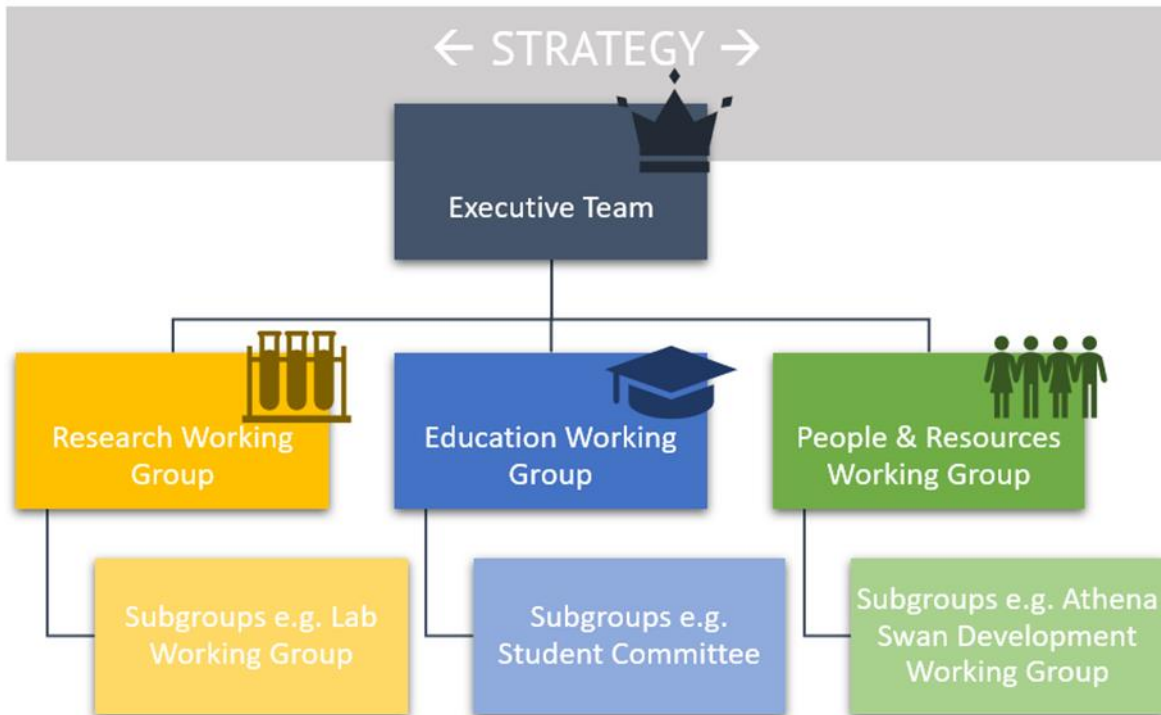
Commitment 4: To manage our resources, to ensure the department's long-term sustainability.

- 4.1 To ensure that the department remains sustainable, is getting best value for money, and to mirror the aspirations of the strategy, the PRWG will work with the Finance Manager to develop and agree meaningful key performance indicators for finance and grants by the end of Michaelmas 2023 and then use these metrics to report to the ET from Hilary 2024 onwards.

- 4.2 HR metrics are important to the department as they can provide insights into the workforce, how it is performing, and how it can improve. Working with the HR Manager, the PRWG will develop and agree meaningful key performance indicators by the end of Michaelmas 2023, and then use these metrics to report to the ET from Hilary 2024 onwards.
- 4.3 The Professional Services Team will seek to develop further meaningful metrics throughout the academic year 2023/24 as a means of establishing performance baselines. These will be brought to the PRWG for consideration and agreement before adoption and implementation and will be reflected in the reporting in Asana on the completion of departmental priorities (goals and subgoals⁶).
- 4.4 To act as the Oversight Board for embedding Asana across the whole department by the end of Trinity 2024. Guaranteeing all Commitments (goals) and Priorities (sub-goals) are clearly connected, visible to the Leadership Framework teams, and reportable, and for ongoing metrics and reporting to be developed and monitored across the five-year period.
- 4.5 To design and agree a full roll out of Peakon to line managers, in agreement with the ET, by the end of Trinity 2024.

⁶ Asana uses the term 'goals' and 'sub-goals' which can be interchanged for the words 'commitments' and 'priorities' within the Departmental Strategy.

Appendix 1 - Leadership Framework Structure 2023/24



Appendix 2 - Strategy Completion Rate 2018/19 to 2022/23

	Total No. Priorities	Completed Priorities	Non-completed Priorities	% Completed	% Not completed
RWG	16	12	4	75	25
PRWG	17	14	3	82	18
EWG	22	13	9	59	41
Total	55	39	16	71	29

Appendix 3 - NDWRH Seminar Strategy

Introduction

1. During term, hybrid seminars are held every Tuesday between 1 pm and 2 pm via MS Teams in the Anne Anderson Lecture Theatre. They are kept for University of Oxford members only. WRH has hosted seminars for many years. PIs invite speakers and are also from our community, including students, particularly in their second and third years, who are expected to present at one of these seminars (and by the third year, at least one presentation is mandatory for DPhil students as part of the confirmation of status).
2. The department wishes to introduce a more focused approach to managing seminars as part of its new five-year strategy. The appointment of theme leads to the department's pillars of science to encourage greater collaboration and integration, which can be extended to create a joined-up plan for seminars. With each theme providing one seminar each term, it will ensure that the department fills gaps in the calendar and that there is a balanced approach to teaching.
3. The four pillars are:
 - Global Health
 - Cancer
 - Maternal and Fetal Health
 - Reproductive Medicine and Genetics

In addition, the department is adding:

- Data Science

as a fifth 'element', which straddles all four areas of science.

6. There are eight weeks per term, so with theme leads providing five seminars, only three other slots need to be filled with either guest or student speakers¹.
7. Trinity Term is a short-term, and seminars will finish in June to allow for vivas. Seminars will then recommence at the beginning of the Michaelmas term, around the second week of October.

Management of Seminars

8. The Seminar Leads manage the department seminars. The team consists of the Seminar Lead and the Deputy Seminar Lead. Appointments are for one year only, from the postdoc community. At the end of the year, the Seminar Lead steps down, and the Deputy Seminar Lead, takes the role of Seminar Lead. HR will then recruit a new Deputy Seminar Lead.

Submitting Seminar Titles for Hilary 2024 and beyond

9. The Seminar Lead and the Deputy Seminar Lead will request two seminar titles from each of the theme leads for Hilary 2024 by email to cover the two remaining terms of the year.
10. The Theme Lead, or their Coordinator will provide:
 - a. the seminar titles
 - b. the speaker
 - c. Educational outcome (if applicable)

- d. preferred date(s) – first come, first served basis will be applied.
11. The Seminar Lead will then schedule the seminar and ensure all relevant parties are informed.

2024/25 onwards

12. From the late summer of 2024, the Seminar Lead and the Deputy Seminar Lead will request seminars from the Theme Leads as early as August/September to provide as much time possible to schedule dates.

Review of the strategy and process

13. A review of the success of this new strategy will occur between July and August 2024, with any changes reflected in the following academic year.

Appendix 4 - NDWRH Asana Strategy

Michaelmas 2023 to Trinity 2024

Why Asana?

Asana is a project management software platform which is cloud-based. The Asana platform enables real-time collaboration and communication among team members, allowing them to collaborate seamlessly on projects. Tracking progress, assigning tasks, and communicating with team members is easier and reduces meeting times.

One of its best features is its variety of project views. You can choose from Kanban-style cards, calendar views, workload overviews and more, allowing you to customise your view based on your team's needs. This flexibility enables you to include more stakeholders and promote collaboration within your team.

Asana's task management capabilities are also noteworthy. You can assign tasks to team members, set deadlines and create subtasks to splice projects into bite-sized pieces, making them easier to tackle. Additionally, team members can comment on tasks, promoting transparency and communication within your team.

Importantly, Asana has the functionality to assign goals based on NDWRH strategy. These can then feed into projects and tasks, providing visualisation of critical tasks and a clear understanding of essential targets to individuals. This functionality also gives management real-time feedback on progress and can help set meaningful and measurable objectives for personal development reviews.

Background

Asana was first introduced to the department as a pilot in March 2023. A small steering group was set up to oversee its launch to two different department groups. The first group was Professional Services, and the second was the EndoCare Group, belonging to Professors Zondervan and Becker ('PI Group'). The objective was to see whether Asana would be an effective management tool in two scenarios.

The steering group's remit was to:

- Access its effectiveness as a project management tool and whether it was fit for purpose in tracking work across the department
- Oversee the pilot for both groups
- Develop conventions for using the software
- Monitor take-up and report to the ET

Professional Services and the PI Group have used Asana for various projects, from apprenticeship development to clinical projects and strategy implementation. The main areas of improvement included:

- **Consolidation:** the tool to consolidate many tasks into specific projects, set up reoccurring tasks, assign them to individuals, understand where there are blockers, etc.
- **Collaboration:** Ability to quickly assign tasks to someone and see the context of that task in one place, receiving updates when a task has been completed, or information has been added, rather than having to find related emails.

- **Transparency:** Clear outline of what actions have been taken for everyone to see within a team, a group or even the department.
- **Tracking:** The capability to see each project using dashboards, portfolios, and status updates helps to understand where a project is and what needs to be done.
- **Consistency:** Re-using templates and building consistency across projects with the same formatting, including how we classify aspects of a project using Asana conventions.

By the summer of 2023, the number of people using Asana within the department had doubled. Control of the numbers within the pilot was difficult because once people had learned that the department was using it, curiosity peaked, and sign-up to Asana increased. What had yet to be made clear by Asana was that those signing up gained immediate access to a full licence because of their full WRH domain name, and the ability to contain those involved in the pilot was difficult

2023 was also the year to review the department's 2018/19-2022/23 four-year strategy and set the next five years. During the previous four years, it was only possible to track the last strategy through minutes of the working groups, a time-consuming and indefinite system.

Switching to Asana provides the opportunity to link work to strategic commitments (in Asana' goals') and priorities (in Asana' sub-goals'). It provides a more comprehensive way of tracking the department's work against the strategy, allows work to be broken down into implementation plans, and helps to improve service by understanding the real-time to complete work.

Work has already been completed on mapping strategic commitments and priorities into Asana. It will enable Chairs of Working Groups to assign tasks to individuals and see progress made. Dashboards will figure in future meetings, with the ability to drill down to overdue tasks.

Following a review of Clinical Research Group¹ (CRG) in the summer of 2023, the recommendations have been transferred to Asana as an implementation plan and can be tracked by the team. Further training with the team will allow them to use Asana to track clinical trials better. Using Asana would help modernise operations and provide clarity and transparency to the department.

Distribution of Licenses and membership

While the pilot has proved especially successful for the Professional Services teams, it has also seen many more people within the department sign up for Asana. The department is keen to support those who wish to use it, but the costs of a full license to the department must also be taken into consideration, and only those who need to use it within the context of the leadership framework or professional services will be provided with a full license from the department. If PI teams wish to obtain a full license, the department will charge for it to their account, but they will receive it at a discounted rate.

The term 'whole department' does not imply every member. It means anyone that requires project management software. It is an essential factor that must be applied because of the cost to the department. It is possible to see when someone last used Asana through the administrator console. If someone has not used Asana for more than four months (except for ill health/maternity, etc), then the license will be revoked.

2022/23 was a learning curve and testing the water. The department is still learning to use Asana. However, to be fully embraced and used as described, a more detailed strategy is required to embed it and ensure its features are understood and can be meaningfully utilised. Areas which need further development include:

- ensuring that there are off the shelf project templates, e.g. one that meets the needs of PIs
- Selling the benefits of Asana; it can be overwhelming if you are not familiar with project management tools
- Ensuring that everyone understands and follows agreed Asana conventions; from responding to tasks assigned to you to creating projects or using Asana in meetings.

Asana Strategy 2023/2024

The department has found using Asana very beneficial and is keen to use it for professional services, the leadership framework, and strategy tracking. However, a more focused approach is required, and the following strategy has been developed to provide this and will commence from Hilary 2024.

From Induction

Basic training will become part of the induction process. In addition, access to the drop-in sessions, run by the Asana Champions² with access to resources on the Hub³, and scheduled training sessions with Generation Digital⁴.

Tailored Drop-in Sessions

Through regular termly surveys, drop-in sessions will be tailored to suit user needs. It will allow the department to understand where people are in the training cycle and help groups develop their understanding further.

Art of the Possible

Asana will be showcased at each of the termly 'all in work days' to show what can be achieved by using the tool. The 'art of the possible' should help to inspire people to use it understand and use its capabilities more effectively.

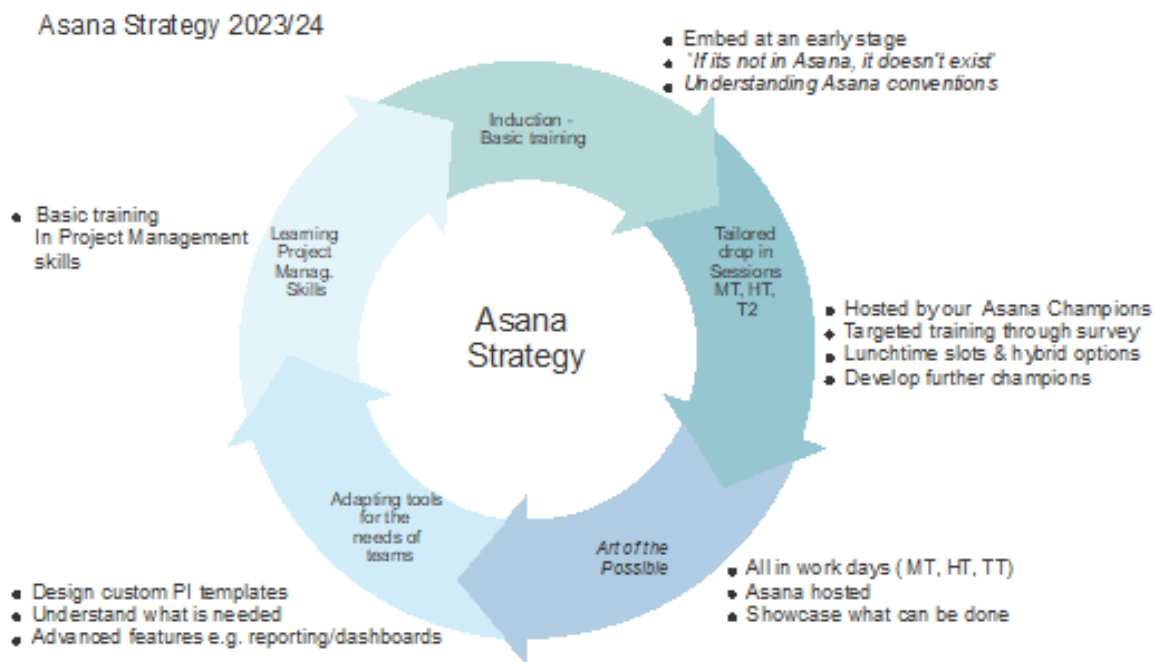
Adapting Tools for the Needs of Teams

Work will begin in Hilary 2024 to understand the templates most beneficial for specific groups. For example, a template developed for a PI Project allowing groups to 'plug and play' could be seen as extremely useful.

Basic Training in Project Management Skills

Ultimately, Asana is a project management tool, and is only as effective as the skilled project manager. By providing some basic training in project management, the department can ensure that the fundamental principles, e.g. defining the project structure, establishing project goals, assigning roles and responsibilities, are followed.

The diagram below shows how the strategy will work in principle.



Timeframe

The timeframe for rolling out Asana is within the current academic year, Hilary, and Trinity 2024. The current steering group⁵ will roll out the strategy.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The impact of Asana will be reviewed over the summer of 2024⁶, with a report to the ET in early Michaelmas 2024.

Conclusion

It will take around three years to fully embed Asana into the psyche of the department. It promises to make the department's operation more streamlined, identify when projects stall, inform and communicate to broader audiences, while providing transparency and reducing the need for lengthy meetings. It can also assist with cross-team communications, such as the department's Science Day while providing valuable skills in project management.

Those who participated agreed that Asana has significantly improved working practices. What is required now is a strategy to roll out implementation to the whole Department. The professional services team and the leadership framework will drive the Asana strategy.

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