



Oxford Machine Learning in Neuroimaging Lab

Lab Handbook

1 Welcome

Welcome to the Oxford Machine Learning in Neuroimaging (OMNI) Lab! We are a team of researchers led by Ana Namburete based at the Department of Computer Science at the University of Oxford. We wrote this document to provide all new members of the OMNI Lab have insight into how our group operates and ensure that you have a great time working in the lab. In this handbook, you will find detailed information about life as a member of the OMNI Lab, what we expect from our researchers, and the support we can offer to your professional development.

We hope this document serves as a reference point throughout your time at OMNI, providing you with the necessary information for an overall positive social and professional experience during your time here. We expect all new members to read this document by the end of their **first month** after joining our lab.

The guidelines described are constantly evolving according to the needs of the group. If you are currently a member of the lab, we encourage you to provide suggestions or modifications to the handbook. For any questions or concerns, you may directly contact [Ana](#) or post a message in the relevant communication channels of the lab (e.g. on Slack, or raise it in our weekly group meetings).

The current manual has been inspired by the work of our colleagues and collaborators (Benjamin Tendler, the WIN Physics group). We are grateful for their support.

– The OMNI Team

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2 Science and Mission

The **Oxford Machine Learning in NeuroImaging (OMNI) Lab** develops reliable, data-efficient machine learning tools to advance medical image analysis— particularly in settings where data, annotations, or computational resources may be limited. We value openness, interdisciplinary collaboration, and practical impact, creating a supportive environment for learning, discovery, and innovation.

We work at the intersection of imaging, artificial intelligence, and healthcare, focusing especially on brain development across the lifespan. From constructing the first normative atlas of fetal brain maturation using ultrasound, to developing biomarkers of brain ageing, our work aims to deepen our understanding of human neurodevelopment and help clinicians identify atypical developmental trajectories earlier and more accurately.

A core strength of our group lies in developing innovative methods— from few-shot and self-supervised segmentation techniques, to models that ensure anatomical plausibility and clinical interpretability. We also pioneer technologies that enhance ultrasound image acquisition, reconstruction, and localisation, making advanced imaging analysis accessible worldwide.

Equity and reproducibility underpin our scientific mission. Our harmonisation tools enable large-scale analyses across diverse imaging datasets, sites, and scanners, preserving privacy and biological integrity. We aim to ensure that AI-driven healthcare solutions work effectively for all—not just under ideal conditions.

As an open, collaborative, and supportive community, we actively mentor lab members to become leaders in research and clinical innovation. By creating practical, rigorous tools and sharing them openly, we strive to support current and future generations working at the exciting intersection of AI and healthcare.

For more information regarding the research carried out at the lab, please visit the [website](#).

3 Research Roles and Expectations

This section outlines how we run the lab, approach science, and interact with one another. Our goal is to foster a positive, stimulating, and rewarding environment. Active participation from every member is essential for achieving these goals.

3.1 General Expectations

- **Follow your passion.** Engage in projects you are proud of and contribute work that matters.
- **Value precision.** Science requires accuracy. Take your time, check your work carefully, and pay attention to detail.
- **Acknowledge and correct mistakes.** Mistakes are part of the scientific process. If errors occur, communicate them promptly to collaborators, especially if results are being written up, submitted, or published. We learn and progress together.
- **Maintain integrity.** Our success depends on honesty. Never plagiarise, falsify, cherry-pick, or omit data. Null and unexpected results are still valuable. Upholding academic integrity is non-negotiable.
- **Support your lab mates.** Science thrives on collaboration. Offer help when you can, and expect to receive help in return. We are a team!
- **Balance independence with openness.** Work independently where possible, but do not be afraid to ask for help. Check this handbook or the lab Wiki first; they may already have the answers you need.
- **Share knowledge.** Mentorship takes many forms, so contribute to a culture of learning.
- **Respect differences.** Value each other's strengths, weaknesses, backgrounds, and beliefs. Communicate openly and with respect, both professionally and personally.
- **Prioritise well-being.** If you encounter challenges, reach out to Ana, or if you prefer, use University services. *Your well-being is a priority*, and your health and happiness matter to the lab. See the section *Work and Wellbeing* for more resources.
- **Sustain your science.** Research is a marathon, not a sprint. Take personal time and holidays when needed, and maintain a life outside the lab. Respect that others do the same.

3.2 Research Students

Role

Research students include those pursuing a degree (Masters, DPhil) or visiting students working on a research project.

Day-to-day

Students are responsible for much of the research in our group. MSc and DPhil students are engaged in one- or three-year trajectories towards a thesis supervised by the PI, sometimes with additional input from collaborators. Their primary task is to advance their own research project

(e.g. reading literature, designing and running experiments), but they also contribute to broader “research-adjacent” work.

A typical week may include:

- algorithm development
- experimental work
- supervision meetings
- one-to-ones with group members
- general lab meetings
- educational or training activities

Support for students

Students are trained professionals and their ideas should be taken seriously. They can expect to meet their supervisors regularly in a supportive environment and should feel empowered to ask questions, admit when they do not understand something, and respectfully point out mistakes. Supervisors will provide regular feedback and encourage students to develop their own ideas to progress their projects.

Expectations of students

Students are an integral part of the lab and often contribute to the group’s functioning beyond their own projects. They are expected to:

- provide regular progress updates in supervision meetings
- actively participate in lab activities (e.g. group meetings, joint reading groups)
- supervise junior students (if there is an appropriate match in terms of topic and schedule availability) - meet Oxford’s formal requirements for their degree (e.g. Transfer of Status, Confirmation of Status, mandatory graduate events, and skills training)

It is the student’s responsibility to fulfil Oxford’s requirements for their degree. This entails monitoring the deadlines for checkpoints relating to their progression (e.g., Transfer of Status and Confirmation of Status), taking part in (mandatory) graduate events, and engaging in skills training.

Students should recognise that their research is a form of training and that challenges and setbacks are part of the learning process. General information on the expectations can be found [here](#). It is also advisable to save and print the email from MPLS Graduate Studies with your requirement deadlines (see example below).

Challenges

Navigating a first major research project is a difficult task. To be successful, students must also develop “soft skills” including effective communication and time management. Unexpected difficulties are part of the research process, e.g., learning how to cope with setbacks takes experience, fortitude, and patience. These stressors can be exacerbated by additional factors throughout the degree, including the isolation of leading a research project, difficulty navigating work-life balance, and distance from long-standing support networks. The OMNI Lab frequently organizes (optional) social activities that encourage non-academic interaction amongst lab members (see Slack’s #social channel).

3.3 Early Career Researcher

Role

Postdoctoral researchers, associate members, and junior research fellows.

Day-to-day

The ECR stage marks a transition towards greater independence. The term “ECR” refers to

Dear [REDACTED]

Welcome to the University of Oxford, and congratulations on being accepted on to your programme in the Mathematical, Physical & Life Sciences Division. Your department and college will have written to you with important information concerning the start of your studies at the University. I should like to provide you with some key dates and information that you will need to be aware of throughout your studies. You will be sent reminders about these at the appropriate points in your studies. However, it is important to be aware of these at the start of your research. Please keep this e-mail in a safe place for future reference.

1. Key Milestone Dates

Transfer of Status (from Probationer Research Student (PRS) status to DPhil or MSc by Research)

This is the first formal assessment of your progress as a research student. The Division normally expects all CDT students to apply to transfer status after a minimum of five terms and at the very latest by the end of their sixth term after admission. Each department has its own set timing and requirements, so please ensure you check this with your relevant department contact.

Your final term (6th term) at Probationer Research Student (PRS) status is Trinity Term 2024. Your milestone assessment should be completed by Friday 11th October 2024.

Confirmation of Status (For DPhil students only)

This is the second formal assessment of your progress. Having successfully transferred to DPhil status, all CDT students are normally expected to apply for confirmation of DPhil status not earlier than the eighth term after admission, and at the very latest by the end of their tenth term. Each department has its own set timing and requirements, so please ensure you check this with your relevant department contact.

Your final term (10th term) to apply for confirmation of status is Michaelmas Term 2025. Your milestone assessment should be completed by Friday 16th January 2026.

Maximum Submission Date

This is the final date by when your thesis should be submitted to the Examination Schools for examination. However, please do check whether you are required to submit sooner by any funding body supporting your studies. Students should aim to submit their thesis for examination before the end of their twelfth term after admission, at the latest.

Your maximum submission date is Friday 9th October 2026.

Figure 1: Example MPLS Graduate Studies email

the academic position held after completing a DPhil/PhD and before securing a faculty role (e.g. assistant, associate, or full professor).

ECRs spend most of their time developing their own line of research while also collaborating on a wider range of projects. Postdoctoral researchers usually lead their own research, which may involve processing and analysing new data, as well as developing solutions to emerging research questions. Depending on needs and funding (as agreed with the PI), their work may be supported by Research Assistants or short-term project students.

ECRs may supervise other lab members (e.g. postdocs, PhD candidates, MSc internship students, and rotation students), where there is an appropriate match in topic and availability. Supervision can range from day-to-day guidance to focused support on a specific part of a project and should be clearly discussed at the outset.

Beyond research, ECRs often take on additional responsibilities, such as committee work, student supervision, outreach, and teaching. They may also be asked to stand in for Ana when required, and to help with or lead grant applications.

Support for ECRs

ECRs can expect Ana and senior group members to dedicate time to their career development, offering both practical advice and feedback on progress. Senior members can also help create opportunities for ECRs to assume more responsibility, grow independence, and engage with the wider research community.

Where ECRs provide supervision, students should take their guidance seriously, respect the demands on their time, and ensure contributions receive proper credit (e.g. co-authorship).

Expectations of ECRs

Having recently completed doctoral training themselves, ECRs are well placed to support students' career development. They often have more time than senior group members (e.g. the PI) to provide guidance, advocate on students' behalf, and help identify appropriate contacts when issues arise.

Ana can expect ECRs to share their expertise within the group and externally (e.g. at conferences), support students with constructive feedback, and participate actively in lab life. This includes attending group meetings, contributing to journal clubs, and joining other relevant meetings (e.g. VGG or OxCIN Analysis Reading Group).

Challenges

Transitioning to increased independence—whether pursuing an academic career or moving into industry—brings considerable responsibility. This stage often involves moving between research groups and/or changing research topics, which requires adjustment.

ECR positions are inherently transitional and often coincide with increasing personal commitments (e.g. starting a family) and the need to apply for grants, fellowships, or jobs. Balancing a diverse workload, the uncertainty of fixed-term contracts, and reduced supervisory support can be challenging.

3.4 Principal Investigator

Role

Ana Namburete is the PI for the OMNI Lab.

Day-to-day

Teaching and research are central to Ana's role. She shapes the lab's scientific vision and contributes to research projects through supervision and collaboration, often directing several

projects in parallel. Alongside this, she manages numerous responsibilities beyond research, including committee work, lab logistics, leadership in large-scale initiatives, grant applications, article reviews, examinations (doctoral vivas), and teaching within both the department and the college.

Her schedule is highly varied: she may shift context multiple times within a day and frequently spends entire workdays in meetings across a wide range of topics.

Support for the PI

Students and ECRs can support Ana by reliably completing agreed tasks. It helps to distinguish which decisions require her input and which can be made independently. Flexibility with scheduling is valuable given her competing demands. Understanding her communication style also fosters an effective working relationship.

Expectations of the PI

Ana provides academic and personal support, along with clear communication of expectations. She contributes actively to ongoing research by offering guidance and mentorship to students and ECRs, typically through regular supervision meetings. These meetings occur weekly, bi-weekly, or *ad hoc* depending on needs, but no less than once per month, and usually last 30–60 minutes. When booking, consider how much time is truly needed. There is no obligation to fill the hour.

Ana offers mentorship on a wide range of research and career topics and often advocates for junior researchers, acting as a “sponsor” when opportunities for advancement arise. She also supports group members during career transitions, whether within academia or beyond.

Challenges

Ana’s workload is extensive, requiring the management of diverse situations, decision-making that affects the lab, and frequent responses to internal and external communications. To work effectively together:

- Distinguish when her input is essential.
- Provide advance notice for scheduling.
- Come prepared for topic-specific meetings (e.g. with slides) to maximise their usefulness.
- Use clear deadlines and timely reminders as final dates approach.

During term time, Ana also teaches and supports a cohort of >20 undergraduate and MSc students at her College. She typically receives more than 30 emails per day and sends nearly as many. Short, concise emails are easiest to handle, and brief replies reflect efficiency rather than criticism. On occasion, Ana may send emails at irregular hours, but **there is no expectation to respond outside your own working hours.**

Delays or oversights are often the result of navigating competing priorities rather than carelessness. Nonetheless, Ana remains open to feedback and discussion about how to improve group management.

3.5 Internal Science Roles

Within the OMNI Lab, a variety of service roles are essential to maintaining a lively and stimulating environment. These roles support the organisation of digital resources and group activities. Taking on a service role is not only important for the smooth running of the lab but also provides valuable opportunities to develop leadership, teamwork, and organisational skills that will benefit your future career.

By sharing the workload, we can prevent responsibilities from falling disproportionately on a few individuals and ensure tasks are allocated according to each researcher’s skills and com-

mitments.

Service roles are held for one academic year (September–August).

Examples of service roles include:

- Organisation of group meetings
- Organisation of the joint Medical Imaging Reading Group
- “Away Day” planning
- Social activities (e.g. drinks, dinners, excursions, meetings with other groups)
- Website and lab handbook maintenance
- Computing cluster maintenance

Some roles require more effort and may be shared by multiple researchers. If you are interested in a particular role, please let Ana know.

If at any point your responsibilities create a disproportionate strain on your primary research, please discuss this with Ana.

4 Culture

4.1 Work and Wellbeing

Looking after your long-term wellbeing is essential to achieving your full potential.

Setting expectations

A key aspect of job satisfaction is having clear and agreed expectations. It can be difficult to predict how long specific tasks will take, so project timelines should be treated as flexible. Communicate openly if deadlines slip, and focus on managing expectations collaboratively. If you feel your workload is negatively affecting your wellbeing, raise this with your PI or line manager.

Working hours

We do not prescribe fixed working hours, but group members are generally expected to be in the lab—or at least reachable (with valid reasons)—during core hours: **10am–2pm on weekdays**.

In the interests of wellbeing, we discourage consistently long working hours. You will benefit from being present in the lab, but you are not required to spend the entire working day there. Find a schedule that works for you, discuss it with your PI or line manager, and raise concerns if you are struggling with productivity.

You should not feel obliged to respond to emails or messages outside of your own working hours, and you should respect the boundaries of others.

Work–life balance

A healthy work–life balance is crucial to managing the pressures of academic research. Make time for activities you enjoy and for necessary personal commitments. In addition to maintaining sustainable daily hours, we strongly encourage taking several weeks of holiday each year fully away from work, including work-related email. The timing of leave is usually up to you, but you may need to plan around group deadlines or other constraints.

Mental wellbeing

Time away from work is vital for mental wellbeing. If a colleague shares that they are struggling, the most important thing you can do is listen.

If you are feeling mentally unwell, you may take sick leave to rest and reduce stress (see the University's [standard annual allowance](#) of sick leave). You are not required to explain to your PI or line manager why you are taking a sick day. If you are unsure what support is available, contact your PI/line manager, HR (staff), or the departmental graduate team (students).

Resources

- [University Work–Life Balance Support](#)
- [University Mental Wellbeing](#)

4.2 Workplace Conduct

We aspire to an inclusive work environment where all members can thrive and achieve their goals.

Conduct in meetings

The OMNI Lab meets (bi-)weekly during the academic year. All members are expected to attend whenever possible. Out of respect for presenters, we maintain a strict ban on device use (laptops and phones).

We aim to create an atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable asking questions regardless of seniority. Questions should be asked in a respectful, friendly manner, and critique must

always focus on the research, not the individual.

Work interactions

Most desks are located in small open-plan offices. Please be considerate of those around you, who may have different needs and preferences, and follow basic open-plan etiquette (e.g. avoid strong odours, distracting noises, or occupying excessive space). Longer or louder discussions should be moved to a meeting room or social area.

Online video meetings can be tiring, particularly for neurodiverse colleagues. Members are encouraged to balance the benefits of such platforms against their downsides and to appreciate that others' needs may differ.

Socialising

Building a cohesive group involves getting to know one another. Lab members often have lunch together or occasionally socialise outside working hours. We sometimes meet to celebrate successes (e.g. a DPhil viva, a grant award, an important paper, or at Christmas dinner).

Everyone is welcome at these gatherings. We try to avoid regular pub-based gatherings, as these settings may exclude some members. When we do meet at a pub, attendance is always optional, alcohol consumption is never expected, and professional yet friendly behaviour is required. Social events are not obligatory, and non-participation will not affect your professional development or standing in the group.

Inappropriate behaviour

We expect all members to foster a positive environment based on mutual respect. Bullying, harassment, victimisation, or discrimination will not be tolerated.

If you experience harassment, you should contact your PI or a harassment advisor. If you witness or suspect inappropriate behaviour towards someone else, discuss it with them confidentially or raise it with the PI or a harassment advisor. For relatively minor issues (e.g. inconsiderate behaviour that does not amount to bullying), you may choose to speak directly to the person concerned if you feel comfortable doing so. However, you should never feel obliged to resolve such situations alone.

University resources on bullying and harassment:

- [Harassment policy](#)
- [Harassment advice](#)
- [Responsible bystander advice](#)
- [Harassment advisor network](#)

4.3 Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

We are committed to fostering an inclusive environment that celebrates the diversity of our group members and promotes equal opportunity. By cultivating a culture of respect and belonging, we aim to support the wellbeing and innovative work of everyone in the lab.

The Personal & The Professional

Every group member represents a unique intersection of experiences and identity, and should feel comfortable bringing their whole selves to work. We seek to nurture this by recognising how differences shape both personal and professional lives, influencing aspirations, challenges, and needs.

Support

Personal background often intersects with mental wellbeing, and experiences of exclusion or inequality can contribute to poor mental health. PIs and line managers receive training on how to support group members and are available to discuss any issues you face, whether or not

they are your direct PI or line manager. Such conversations will be treated with the highest confidentiality, unless ethical or safety concerns require otherwise.

Building communities

EDI covers a wide range of topics and challenges. Some may feel unfamiliar or uncomfortable to address at first. The **Oxford Centre for Integrative Neuroimaging (OxCIN)** hosts regular educational events that aim to normalise respectful and constructive conversations about EDI, especially in the context of academic workplaces. These sessions can help you better understand the challenges faced by colleagues and explore how to act in solidarity.

Through our affiliation with **OxCIN**, the OMNI Lab has access to their full range of EDI resources. We encourage all members to engage with these opportunities, alongside the broader *Member Networks*, which provide valuable learning and peer support.

Resources

- [Member Networks](#)
- [OxCIN EDI Strategy](#)
- [University EDI Unit](#)
- [University Occupational Health](#)
- [Student-Specific Wellbeing](#)
- [Annual Leave Policy](#)

4.4 Good Citizenship

The success of the OMNI Lab relies on members supporting one another and contributing to the wider community.

Being a good citizen

As a member of the OMNI Lab, you are strongly encouraged to take part in some form of lab service. This type of “good citizenship” helps ensure the smooth day-to-day running of lab activities and prevents the burden from falling disproportionately on a few individuals. See also the section on [Internal Service Roles](#) for specific examples of responsibilities that keep the lab functioning smoothly.

What constitutes good citizenship?

Good citizenship refers to activities that primarily benefit the lab as a whole rather than individual research projects. Examples include:

- Teaching or training
- Advising colleagues
- Assisting with group administration
- Volunteering for studies

There is no expectation that everyone participates in all of these activities, nor any requirement to justify not taking part in certain forms of good citizenship.

Finding a balance

Good citizenship activities can be time-consuming and should not significantly interfere with research progress. We also recognise that not everyone has the capacity to take on additional responsibilities—for example, due to disability or caring duties. If you are considering activities that might take substantial time away from your main research, we recommend discussing them with your PI or line manager.

5 Development

5.1 Career Development

5.2 Open & Responsible Research

We are committed to engaging with best practices in science, ensuring that our work is open, reproducible, and conducted with integrity.

Open science

Open science practices serve multiple purposes: they promote reproducibility and accountability, help the field progress more rapidly by reducing duplication of effort, and align with the growing expectations of funders and publishers. The OMNI Lab is strongly committed to adopting and promoting best practices in open science.

Reproducible research

Maintaining research outputs (code, data, figures, etc.) in a reproducible state makes it easier for you—and others—to revisit and build upon them later. Reproducibility is not only good practice for documentation and error-checking, it also facilitates responsible data sharing on open platforms.

Discovering mistakes

Identifying and correcting mistakes is a natural and important part of the scientific process. Mistakes happen to everyone. Reproducible research outputs provide a clearer pathway for you and others to catch errors, correct them, and move the science forward with confidence.

Research conduct

Our group is wholly committed to ethical and responsible research.

- If you are uncertain about the ethical implications of an action, feel pressured to compromise your integrity, or observe research misconduct, please raise your concerns.
- In the first instance, speak with your PI or line manager.
- If your concerns are not adequately addressed, you may also approach a secondary advisor, the head of group or division, or a trained harassment advisor.
- If the issue cannot be resolved locally, refer to the University's formal guidelines for reporting misconduct.

If you ever feel uncomfortable with the practices you are being asked to engage in, it is always best to voice your concerns respectfully. You will be supported in doing so.

Generative AI

The University has introduced a [policy on the use of generative AI in research](#). All members of the OMNI Lab are expected to use generative AI responsibly and in line with this guidance. The policy will continue to evolve, so please check the linked page regularly for the most up-to-date information.

Resources

- [University Research Integrity and Ethics](#) – guidance on research conduct
- [University Policy on Academic Integrity](#) – information on plagiarism and good practice
- [UK Research Integrity Office](#) – national resources on good research practice
- [Committee on Publication Ethics \(COPE\)](#) – best practices in publication ethics
- [University Policy on Generative AI in Research](#)

5.3 Responsible usage of AI for Research

Generative AI

All staff and students at Oxford have been assigned a free **ChatGPT Edu licence**.

Used responsibly, generative AI offers significant opportunities to enhance the way we work, teach, and learn, and to propel our research towards new breakthroughs. The University has introduced a [policy on the use of generative AI in research](#), which all OMNI Lab members are expected to follow. Please check this page regularly for the most up-to-date information.

To support you with your new account, the University has published further information on the [GenAI at Oxford website](#), including:

- AI training opportunities delivered by specialists across the University
- FAQs and guidance on responsible use
- Inspiration from colleagues already using GenAI tools in their work
- Information about technical support

Accessing ChatGPT Edu

- Use your University Single Sign-On (SSO) email address (e.g. abcd1234@ox.ac.uk).
- Log in at [ChatGPT](#) with your SSO email.
- You will be redirected to OpenAI's Oxford University portal. Continue sign-in via SSO authentication.
- For step-by-step instructions, see the [ChatGPT Edu Onboarding Guide](#).

Lab-level expectations

In the OMNI Lab, generative AI can be a valuable tool for:

- drafting text (e.g. outlines, summaries, or emails)
- exploring code solutions and debugging
- brainstorming ideas or clarifying background information

However, AI must never replace your own critical thinking or compromise academic integrity.

- Do **not** use AI to generate falsified data, fabricate references, or bypass your own responsibility for original contributions.

- Always fact-check AI outputs and take responsibility for any content you include in your work.
- Be transparent when AI has been used in your workflow, following publisher and University guidelines.

5.4 Managing Collaborations

How to get the most out of scientific collaborations

Why collaborate?

Collaboration allows researchers with complementary expertise to contribute to different aspects of a project, generating results that would not be possible individually. Even among researchers with similar expertise, collaboration fosters the exchange of ideas and can spark innovation. Collaborations often lead to co-authorships and demonstrate your ability to work effectively as part of a larger team.

When to collaborate

While collaboration is usually beneficial, it represents a significant commitment and should be considered carefully in consultation with your PI or line manager. Collaborations can sometimes slow progress on your own research, and over-committing risks disappointing collaborators. If you and your PI or line manager cannot agree on whether to pursue a collaboration, seek advice from an independent PI.

Setting expectations

Be clear about the time and effort you are willing to contribute to a collaboration. Although there are no universal rules for co-authorship, senior academics generally have a good understanding

of disciplinary norms. If you and your PI or line manager feel authorship is appropriate, they will typically help negotiate this on your behalf. These discussions are best held early, and revisited when preparing a publication. When deciding whether to offer co-authorships on your own papers, always discuss this with your PI or line manager, and follow the OMNI Lab's Authorship Guidelines.

5.5 Travel & Conferences

Our expectations about travel, including collaborative visits and conferences.

Conferences – the basics

Conferences are valuable opportunities to present your research and engage with external colleagues. They usually feature scientific talks, posters, and training sessions. If you are interested in attending, discuss it with your PI or line manager. Considerations include:

- relevance to your research topic
- readiness of your work for presentation
- opportunities to learn and network
- timing relative to your research schedule

Logistical factors (funding, accommodation, visas, etc.) should also be planned well in advance.

Planning and what to expect

The main purposes of attending conferences are to present your research, represent the group, and learn about your field. Conferences are busy, so plan ahead and make good use of your time. Discuss your goals with your PI or line manager. Ask questions, be curious, and engage in discussions—most researchers enjoy talking about their work. These conversations can spark new insights, collaborations, and often long-term professional friendships.

Looking out for labmates

Although uncommon, work travel can place people in vulnerable situations. Lab members are expected to look out for each other and are strongly encouraged to establish a communication channel (e.g. WhatsApp group) when attending the same meeting. If you see a colleague in an uncomfortable situation, consider whether you can assist. If you experience or observe problematic behaviour, talk to your PI or raise the issue with the conference organisers.

Expectations

While travel can be a rewarding part of academic life, it also brings challenges. For colleagues with disabilities or caring responsibilities, or for those who feel unsafe or uncomfortable travelling to particular destinations, travel may not be feasible. You should never feel pressured to travel, nor should you be disadvantaged if you choose not to. If you have concerns, speak with your PI, who can advise on alternative ways to gain similar benefits.

Practical tips

- **Funding:** Conferences can be expensive. Explore internal funding opportunities—see the [funding guide](#)—as well as external travel grants. Ask your PI about available options.
- **Posters:** Keep posters clear and visually engaging. Use large fonts, minimal text, and graphics that tell a story. Templates are available in the [templates page](#).
- **Talks:** Tailor your presentation to the audience. Highlight the key message, keep slides simple, and rehearse beforehand. You can also use the [presentation templates](#) to get started.
- **Networking:** Conferences are ideal for meeting potential collaborators. Introduce yourself to researchers whose talks interest you, attend social events, and don't hesitate to follow up after the meeting.
- **Wellbeing:** Conferences can be intense. Take short breaks, step outside for fresh air, and give

yourself space to recharge.

5.6 Public Engagement