



The Agile Initiative at the Oxford Martin School

An experiment in doing research differently

2022-2027



“We set up Agile to test whether universities could respond more effectively to the scale of the biodiversity and climate crisis. Five years on, the urgency has only grown and we now know much more about the research, relationships and institutional support needed to respond.”

Professor Nathalie Seddon | Director, Agile Initiative



Welcome from the Agile Initiative team

What would it take to make research more responsive to the climate and nature emergency?

Agile began with an ambitious proposition: Could a university organise rigorous interdisciplinary research differently so that it could respond to urgent decisions on the environment within the timescales in which evidence was needed? What relationships, skills, funding mechanisms and institutional support would be needed to make that possible?

Over five years (2022–2027), with funding from the Natural Environment Research Council, we tested different ways of identifying questions, assembling teams, working with decision-makers and supporting researchers. Throughout, we adapted the programme in response to what we learned.

Here we tell the story of the Agile Initiative – where it came from, what it has achieved to date, and where we hope it goes from here. Read on to discover more about the purpose and ethos, the research that’s been undertaken and what we learned about doing research differently.

Agile has been described as a ‘labour of love’, and that is true. Hundreds of people have been part of what we’ve built, and the community we formed was not incidental to the experiment. Building and supporting it became one of the conditions that made the research possible. And it could not have happened without the diverse team of people from across different disciplines and parts of the University’s research and administrative system who have steered it through every twist and turn, as well as the many supporters and advisors from well beyond the University.

A huge thank you to and from the whole Agile community.

“I have lost count of the number of times I have referenced the Agile project in my interactions and initiatives across the University. I commend the project team for their ability to convey the relevance of Agile to various strategic initiatives, from research culture, equitable practices, and exemplifying new, impactful approaches to conducting research.”

Dr Tanita Casci | Director of the Research Strategy and Policy Unit, University of Oxford

“I am struck by how Agile researchers talk with passion, not only about the research itself, but also the way their research was connected to policy makers from the outset and how this was critical to enabling their research insights to have real influence.”

Professor Patrick Grant | PI, Agile Initiative; Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), University of Oxford

The Agile experiment

The Challenge

Effective policy and world-class research are both needed to prevent catastrophic environmental degradation on a global scale, yet research and decision-making often operate in different worlds and to different timelines.

The Inspiration

The COVID-19 response demonstrated that universities, funders and governments could mobilise expertise at unusual speed under exceptional circumstances. Agile asked what could be learned from that experience for complex and persistent environmental challenges and what would have to work differently.

The Proposition

Tackling the challenge requires changes in how we do research, as well as in research culture and practice. Therefore, three interacting aspects of research, community and culture came to form the core of the Agile experiment.

Community

We also asked what relationships, skills and forms of collaboration enable researchers and decision-makers to work effectively together.

We recognised that they would need to work together in new ways. Skills-building, career development, community-building, inclusive practices and collective learning were therefore integral to the experiment.

Research

We asked whether research institutions could respond to urgent environmental policy needs, producing evidence on live policy matters, while retaining the rigour, independence and depth expected of academic research.

We experimented with fast-paced research Sprints, with the core research period lasting six to twelve months. Sprints would mobilise interdisciplinary research teams to deliver policy-ready results that decision-makers needed, when they need it.

Culture and systems

Finally, we wanted to know what needs to change within universities and funding bodies to support this work. The current system is not well suited to rapid, interdisciplinary research. Agile set out to collate evidence and learning on the culture shifts needed to enable people to work in this way.



A values-driven approach

Five values guided us:

Experimentation

We sought to push boundaries, explore opportunities, learn from success and failures, adapt, and always strive to improve. We treated the programme itself as an experiment, changing course when evidence suggested we should.

Ambition

Tackling major societal challenges means confronting existing systems and norms, being willing to challenge and change conventional structures and incentives. We sought not to shy away from difficult issues.

Collaboration

We valued the knowledge and experiences of everyone involved in the endeavour and committed to creating an environment in which to learn from each other. We collaborated across disciplines, research and policy cultures, recognising that relationships require time and active facilitation.

Transparency

Agile's plans, processes, decision making, and progress were shared openly and clearly; we also committed to share what did not work and what remains uncertain. We did this to improve fair and equitable participation in research, co-creation, and policy-oriented solutions.

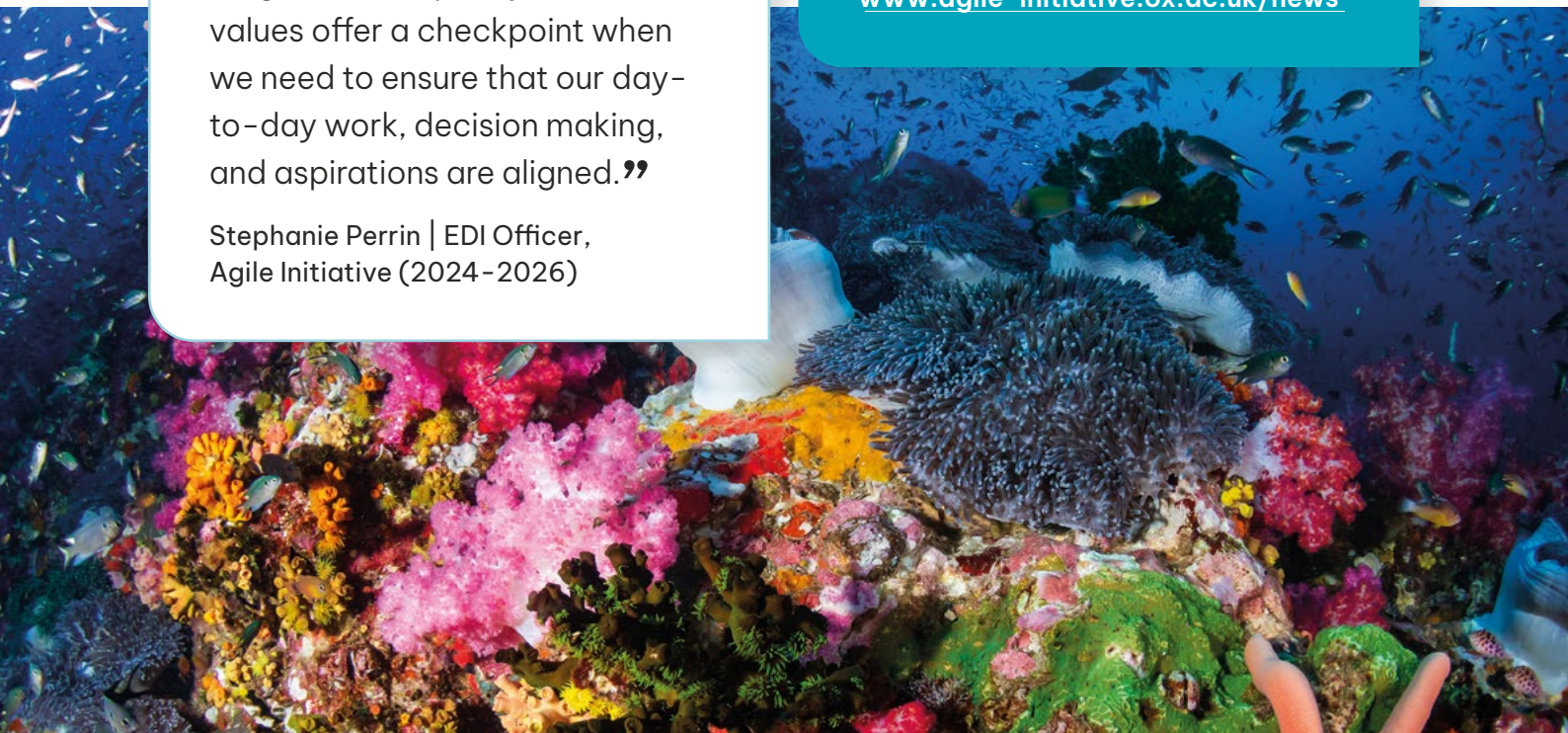
Pragmatism

Working at policy pace sometimes means using existing evidence and established methods intelligently. We strove to produce realistic, evidence-based solutions in useful and practical formats. We also offered practical support to researchers aligned with their level of readiness and career development objectives.

“Agile moves quickly, and our values offer a checkpoint when we need to ensure that our day-to-day work, decision making, and aspirations are aligned.”

Stephanie Perrin | EDI Officer,
Agile Initiative (2024–2026)

For many researchers, Agile has offered new opportunities and experiences. Throughout the programme, researchers have shared the ups and the downs of their personal Agile stories through a series of blogs: our Researcher Spotlights. www.agile-initiative.ox.ac.uk/news



What is a Sprint?

We began with five working hypotheses about what a successful research Sprint would require. Across the programme, we tested, refined and sometimes challenged these five elements.

As the programme developed, we also saw the importance of sustained relationships, skilled facilitation, flexible funding, disciplined scoping, and strong project management.

Policy pull:

A consequential evidence gap identified with decision-makers linked to a live environmental decision or policy process

Timeliness:

A current or imminent policy opportunity for which the science is needed, where primary research has real potential to translate into early outcomes and impact

Interdisciplinarity:

Bringing together and actively integrating the disciplinary perspectives and methods needed to address the problem, incorporating expertise from research, policy and practice

Co-creation:

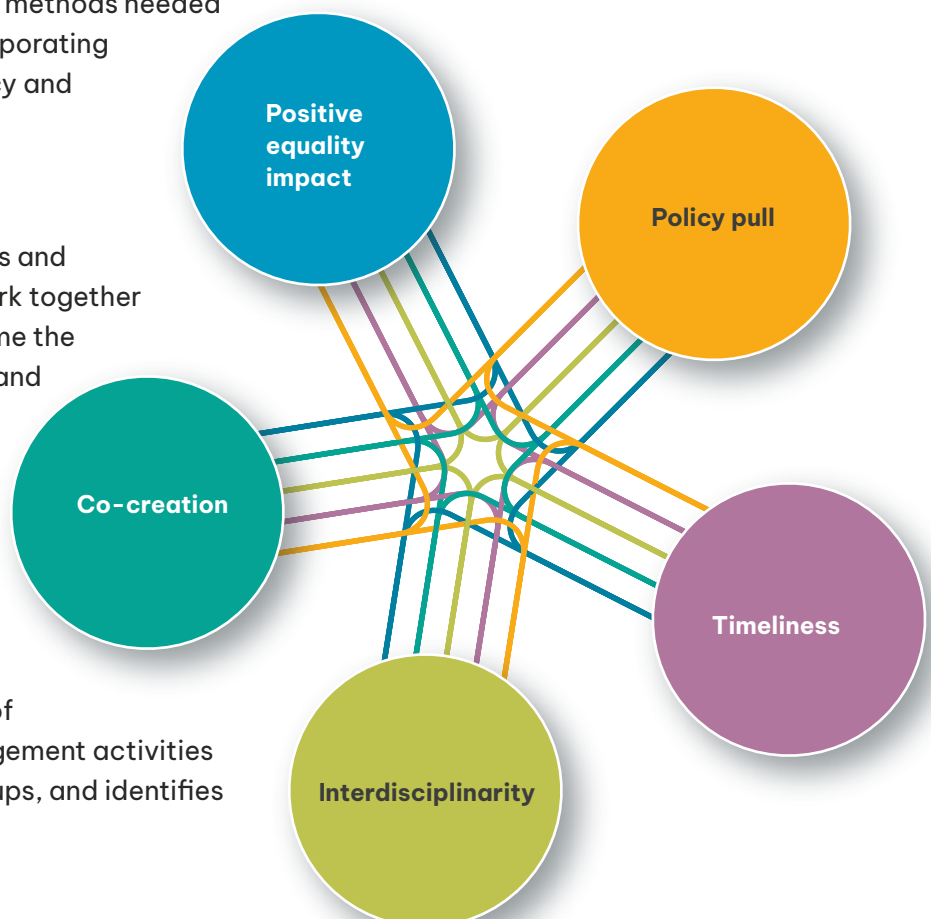
Researchers, decision-makers and professional support staff work together throughout the project to frame the problem, shape the research and develop outputs that can be used

Positive equality impact:

An inclusive approach that evaluates potential positive and negative consequences of the proposed research, engagement activities and impacts for different groups, and identifies mitigation measures

“Our analysis of the Sprints shows that effective collaboration depends on how the multiple, overlapping timelines of science-to-policy work are aligned, adapted and navigated.”

Dr Mark Hirons | Programme Research Lead, Agile Initiative



The journey so far

The Agile Initiative is one of four programmes funded by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) under the *Changing the Environment* scheme from 2022-2027. Central to Agile's grant was a large flexible fund which was used to identify and fund new Sprints led by Oxford-based researchers throughout the programme.

2022-23

We got underway, organised our governance structure, and established a support framework to keep the Sprints on track and capture learning.

Six 'pioneer' Sprints began. These were all built into the original research proposal and needed some reconfiguration in focus, structure and team because of changes in the policy context in the intervening period.

So, even before the first Sprints began, we learned that policy relevance can be fragile: questions, partnerships and project designs may need to change as decision contexts evolve.

Strengthening equality, diversity and inclusion

With extra funding from NERC in 2023-24 we developed a strong Diversity & Inclusion Plan, recruited an EDI Officer, and strengthened our approach to accessibility. This was a key example of how we adapted our practice.



2020

The Agile Initiative was born when ideas from across the environmental science ecosystem at Oxford were brought together for a bid to Changing the Environment.

Building the cohort

We knew that expecting researchers to work differently without investing in the relevant skills was unrealistic. Community building and training has formed a key component of Agile. We encouraged leads to build in time for training. We have delivered sessions on career development, interdisciplinarity, pitching to policy makers, and writing for policy.

2023

We designed and ran our first call for new Sprint ideas, our first 'experiment'. Guidance was drawn from lessons learned with the 'pioneer' Sprints.

Experiment 1: Open researcher-led call

What we learned: Many excellent proposals addressed important environmental problems, but topics of most interest to academics did not always coincide with a live policy need and co-creation was not strong.

Four new Sprints were funded.

● Photo: Agile's Summer School in 2023

2024

In 2024 we ramped up the experiment, building on the learning from the first call in 2023. The biggest question was ‘How could we strengthen policy pull and timeliness?’ We ran two calls, two new experiments.

Experiment 2: Questions generated directly by decision-makers

What we learned: Stronger policy demand alone did not produce effective Sprint proposals. Researchers also needed clearer framing, guidance and opportunities to develop the collaboration and align research interests with policy evidence needs.

One new Sprint was funded.



Experiment 3: Hybrid approach mixing ‘defined’ questions from decision-makers with an ‘open’ track for researcher-led questions

What we learned: Strengthened guidance and briefings, with a longer time for proposals to be developed, generated strong interest from researchers and decision-makers. 48 proposals were submitted by researchers and partners from numerous academic disciplines and policy fields. Six more Sprints were funded.

Researching Agile

We appointed two Research Fellows to help analyse the wide range of learning emerging, while contributing to different Sprints and supporting community building. Questions we are addressing include: How does co-created, impact-oriented research work? What forms of relationship matter? What is an appropriate pace? What are the costs and benefits to researchers? What institutional barriers recur?

2025

Six new Sprints got underway, we began sharing emerging results and learning in conferences and events. With additional funds released by NERC, we had the opportunity to experiment further.



● Photos: The biodiversity net gain team were commended at the Vice-Chancellor Awards in 2024, and above, Tamsin presenting at Agile Connect: Practice, Research & Policy in 2025



2026

With the programme entering its final full year, time was split between Sprint implementation, promoting research results, capturing and sharing learning. Remaining funds were dedicated to trying two new approaches to Sprint design.

Experiment 4: Commissioning Sprints in response to emerging demand signals in a changing geopolitical context

What we learned: We proactively brought together researchers and decision-makers on two new interdisciplinary projects tackling policy priorities related to national security and the environment. Both demonstrated enthusiasm for the model, while reiterating a recurring theme: it takes time to get a Sprint ready to launch.

Experiment 5: Researcher-led Science-to-Policy projects on a much shorter timescale

What we learned: We offered five small grants to test whether the principles developed through six-to-twelve-month Sprints could support useful research on a much shorter, three-month timescale.

The question was not simply whether research could be done faster, but which kinds of policy question could be addressed rigorously within such a short window, and what support researchers would need. While core research activities were completed, producing final publications required more time.

● **Photos: Nathalie and Aline at COP-30 in 2025, and right, the Changing the Environment programme managers presenting at ARMA 2026**

Enabling impact

One of Agile's clearest lessons has been that responsive interdisciplinary research depends on a substantial enabling infrastructure. The professional programme team (the 'engine room') connected researchers and decision-makers, helped teams refine projects, supported interdisciplinary working, negotiated institutional barriers, monitored influence and impact, and carried learning between Sprints, other programmes and the funder.

2026-2027



The programme comes to an end in 2027, by which time we will have funded 24 projects, held numerous events and community building activities, and produced over a hundred different outputs, both academic and non-traditional. The following pages give a flavour of all the Sprints and research activities, as well as results, outputs and emerging impacts.

In the final stage of our journey, we are developing pathways to embed Agile learning in researcher practices, policy partners, University and funder systems.



Our research: The Sprints

2022-2024



How do we account for biodiversity?

Read: [Assessing Biodiversity Net Gain plans: a quick guide for planners and developers](#)

Responding to a live policy need identified with HM Treasury and Defra, this Sprint examined how biodiversity net gain (BNG) could be delivered in ways that are ecologically robust, socially just and practically actionable. Combining ecological, economic and social perspectives, the research identified important limitations in current approaches: the biodiversity metric did not consistently reflect invertebrate diversity and abundance; BNG delivery could better account for community access to nature; and integrating ecological and economic information into offset targeting could improve the delivery of wider ecosystem-service benefits. The Sprint developed a more integrated pathway for BNG implementation, and government partners indicated that the findings would inform policy development and described the research as fundamental to their thinking. So far, findings have been cited by various organisations, including The British Academy, POSTnotes, Institute of Development Studies, and the OECD.



● **Photo: Conducting fieldwork**

“The rapid pace of the Sprint meant we had to be consistently aware of and focused on our overarching goals. Our team was bursting with fantastic ideas and potential new research angles, but we had to set clear boundaries on what was and wasn’t feasible within the timeframe. Ultimately, this enabled us to achieve a huge amount in a very short time, and generate research that will hopefully have a tangible impact on policy.”

Hannah Nicholas | Researcher on Biodiversity Net Gain Sprint



Can we turn waste into fertiliser?

Read: [Re-organising nutrients flows in Leicestershire: Systemic innovation to transform nutrient flows for environmental and socioeconomic benefits](#)

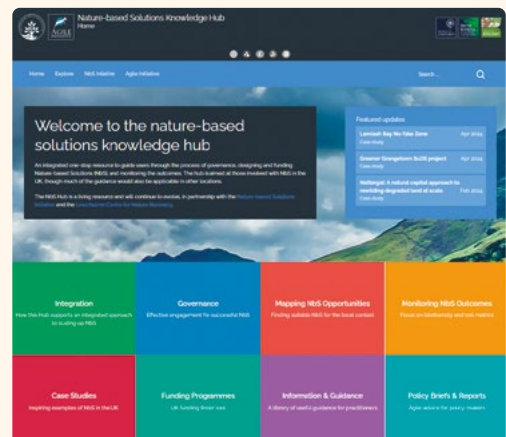
To address the challenge of compulsory household food-waste collection and wider concerns about fertiliser security, this Sprint worked with Leicestershire County Council, Defra, industry and other stakeholders to explore how regional organic waste could become a more valuable nutrient resource. Combining engineering, environmental, food-systems and economic perspectives, the team identified major infrastructure and data gaps that hinder organic food waste collection and nutrient flow optimisation. Analysis highlighted the value of stakeholder-led food systems mapping, improved data acquisition, and robust business and economic assessment of available technologies. Practical opportunities include recovering nutrients before they enter wastewater, improving the use of digestate, reducing nutrient losses from farming, and bringing nutrient sources and users closer together. The work strengthened Leicestershire County Council's readiness for changes to food-waste policy and connected key actors across the regional system.



How do we scale up Nature-based Solutions?

Read: [Nature-based Solutions Knowledge Hub](#)

Although interest in Nature-based Solutions was growing rapidly across UK policy and practice, practitioners and policymakers lacked an integrated, evidence-based resource to help them identify where NbS could be deployed, how they should be designed and governed, and how outcomes should be monitored. Working with intended users, this Sprint brought together ecological, social, governance, spatial and natural-capital expertise to translate a fragmented evidence base into practical decision support. The resulting UK Nature-based Solutions Knowledge Hub combines guidance, case studies and tools spanning design, governance, finance, engagement and monitoring, including spatial Opportunity and Natural Capital Maps and a Recipe for Engagement. Its subsequent use in Local Nature Recovery Strategies for Yorkshire, Shropshire, Surrey, Oxfordshire and Somerset, and in work on multifunctional landscapes in Scotland and Highland Rewilding's engagement strategy demonstrates a pathway from co-produced research to policy and practice.





How can Brazil reach Net Zero emissions

Read: [Nature-based solutions are critical for putting Brazil on track towards net-zero emissions by 2050](#)

With climate change ambition and policy implementation misaligned, this Sprint sought to identify a sustainable and affordable policy pathway to achieve Brazil's 2050 Net Zero ambitions. Timed to inform the Brazilian general election and COP27 at the end of 2022, the team combined land-use and regional integrated assessment models to test engineered and nature-based mitigation potentials under locally meaningful policy scenarios. The results demonstrated that halting deforestation and enabling large-scale restoration could put Brazil on track for Net Zero, supplying nearly 80% of its mitigation needs, while reducing reliance on more costly engineered solutions and delivering additional benefits for biodiversity and climate resilience. The findings helped inform Brazil's official modelling of sectoral policies and development of its NDC and long-term low-emissions strategy.

● **Photo: Aline at an event about the Amazon rainforest with the Brazilian embassy**



“[Aline] contributed to the development of impact projections for public policies in the Land Use, Land-Use Change, and Forestry (LULUCF) sector under the framework of the National Simulator of Sectoral Policies and Emissions (SINAPSE). [Her] contributions were invaluable for enhancing the tool, particularly regarding the detailed representation of national policies in the LULUCF sector for version 2.0 of the tool.”

Régis Rathmann | Technical Coordinator of SINAPSE, and
Márcio Rojas | Coordinator of the General Coordination
for Climate Science, both at Brazil's Ministry of Science,
Technology, and Innovation



How can maritime shipping transition to green ammonia as fuel?

Read: [Optimal fuel supply of green ammonia to decarbonise global shipping](#)

Working closely with the Department for Transport and UK Shipping Office for Reducing Emissions, this interdisciplinary Sprint developed practical pathways for scaling green ammonia as shipping fuel to meet the International Maritime Organisation's decarbonisation targets. By integrating engineering, infrastructure, economic and policy analysis, the team showed how cost-efficient production, falling renewable-energy costs and regionalised supply could substantially reduce fuel costs, while identifying priority ports and supply chains for deployment. The Sprint's paper, published as part of IOP's Environmental Research Series, has been cited by a number of organisations including Mirage News, Techxplore, Offshore Energy Biz, Business Green, and the World Bank.

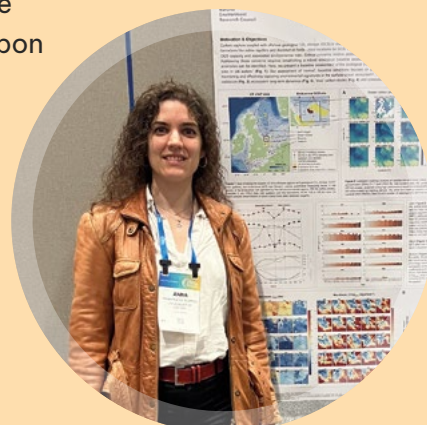


What do we need to know to safely store CO₂ beneath our shelf seas?

Read: [Filling in the evidence gaps for the safe deployment of offshore geological carbon storage](#)

Addressing a critical evidence and regulatory challenge in the UK's plans for offshore carbon storage, this interdisciplinary Sprint examined what is needed to ensure geological CO₂ storage beneath shelf seas can be deployed safely and responsibly. Using the Endurance site in the North Sea as a case study, the team combined new research with engagement across regulators, industry and other stakeholders to identify gaps in current evidence and governance. Recommendations included stronger independent scrutiny of the data underpinning storage permits and licences, fuller assessment of marine carbon stocks, including water-column carbon, and greater legislative clarity over when projects may qualify for environmental exemptions. The work provided a practical evidence base for strengthening the regulation and environmental safeguards surrounding future offshore CO₂ storage.

● **Photo:** Anna presenting at the Ocean Sciences Meeting, 2024



2024-2025



How can we manage uncertainties in habitat greenhouse gas emissions?

Read: [What does the large range in potential methane 'CO2 equivalent' evaluation imply for climate policy targets? An initial exploration in the context of agricultural emission scenarios for Northern Ireland](#)

This Sprint worked with DAERA and The Wildlife Trusts to address significant uncertainties in how land-use change and management affect greenhouse gas emissions and removals. Using Northern Ireland and UK grassland, peatland and agricultural systems as case studies, the team combined statistical modelling with analysis of methane accounting to strengthen the evidence underpinning restoration and net-zero decisions. The research contributed to and was cited in DAERA's Draft Climate Action Plan and helped The Wildlife Trusts integrate land-based emissions and removals into its GHG inventory and net-zero target.

● **Photo: Xiao presenting at the College of Agriculture Food & Rural Enterprise**



“The project provided DAERA with valuable and timely advice on how best to set out the complex issues surrounding GHG assessment metrics in a scientifically robust but digestible manner within the draft Climate Action Plan.”

Patrick Savage | Partner on Habitat Emissions Sprint, Climate Action Plan Team (DAERA)



Can we solve the ‘spin-up’ problem in Earth System Modelling?

Read: [Efficient spin-up of Earth System Models using sequence acceleration](#)

Working with the UK Met Office, this Sprint tackled a major computational bottleneck in Earth System Models (ESMs), which underpin IPCC climate projections and international climate policy. The team developed and tested an algorithm that substantially accelerates the model ‘spin-up’ needed before climate simulations can begin, enabling a wider range of uncertainties and scenarios to be explored. The approach was successfully integrated into the Met Office’s supercomputing environment for production calculations and made openly available for use by other modelling centres, with early uptake amongst the climate modelling community internationally, including in Spain, USA, Norway, Japan and Germany.



Can regenerative agriculture deliver nutritious food and a just food system?

Read: [Can regenerative agriculture deliver nutritious food and a just food system?](#)

Given growing policy interest in regenerative agriculture, this Sprint worked with the Food Foundation, Green Alliance, Defra and a wide range of food-system stakeholders to examine how it could support environmental, health and social goals. The team found that regenerative agriculture’s flexibility can empower farmers, foster innovation and build resilience, but also creates governance and labelling challenges. Realising its benefits requires supply chain reform, supportive policy, transparent standards, improved assessment approaches, and cross-sector collaboration. Findings indicate that regenerative agriculture’s value lies less in prescribing specific practices and more in strengthening the capacity of farming systems to balance trade-offs and respond to complex sustainability goals. The work has led to engagement and discussion with organisations working on regenerative agriculture including the Scottish Government, Regen10, the CCC, academic colleagues, and European organisations building networks between countries.



● **Photo:** Ruth and Richard presenting at the 2025 Agile Showcase



Is ‘nature’ a policy solution to mental health in schools?

Read: Conceptual framework for assessing the economic impact of nature-based programmes on the mental health and well-being of adolescents (secondary school-aged students)

This Sprint was co-created with the Department for Education, secondary-school educators and a young people’s advisory group in response to growing interest in nature-based programmes (NbPs) as a way of supporting adolescent mental health. The team synthesised evidence on the mental-health and wellbeing impacts of NbPs and developed a cost-benefit framework to support policy decisions. The research found promising evidence of benefits, while identifying significant resource and logistical barriers to implementation. Recommendations emphasised cross-sector collaboration and integrating nature-based approaches within whole-school wellbeing strategies. The research was recently referenced by the Minister for School Standards in response to a question around the benefits of children having access to nature as part of their education



● **Photo: Katrin and Kim at the deliberative policy action workshop**

“I really enjoyed working on the Agile Sprint. I have worked with researchers from various disciplines in my public engagement role but not in such a broad multi-disciplinary team. It was great to work with colleagues from different fields, on such an important area of research, with a focus on rapid outcomes.”

Rodger Caseby | Researcher on Nature in Schools Sprint



“This work helped to move practitioner discussion beyond templates and compliance toward questions of governance, durability and real-world outcomes.”

Dr Aline Congreve | Partner on Global Biodiversity Framework Sprint, CIEEM Associate Trainer



How can the UK implement the Global Biodiversity Framework's finance goals?

Read: [Can biodiversity markets deliver inclusive and collaborative nature recovery? Lessons from different habitat banking models in England](#)

Working with Defra and other partners, this Sprint addressed the emerging policy challenge of how the UK could implement the Global Biodiversity Framework's finance goals. Combining financial analysis, biodiversity modelling, stakeholder engagement and policy design, the team mapped the overseas biodiversity impacts of six major UK banks, modelled how subsidy reform and green-finance policies could reduce harmful flows, and built the world's largest database of nature restoration funds. The findings highlighted the need for targeted regulation, stronger international coordination and careful market design, and have helped shape plans for England's proposed Nature Restoration Fund, and the work of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership, who have listed the Biodiversity Markets paper on their website.



● **Photo: Sophus at Oxford University Museum of Natural History**

2025-2026



How can we deliver effective, equitable and place-based environmental governance?

Read: [How can place-based working contribute to a well-being economy and environmental goals in Wales?](#)

The Sprint responded to a live policy need put forward by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to translate national ambitions for nature recovery, climate resilience, sustainable food systems, community wellbeing and a wellbeing economy into meaningful action. Working in close partnership with NRW, the team explored how effective, equitable and place-based environmental governance could be delivered in Wales. Findings demonstrated that emphasis should be placed on activating and connecting existing mechanisms such as Area Statements to shape planning, investment and delivery in practice. The research identified that dedicated resources, enhanced leadership, better alignment between governance mechanisms, and improved evaluation were needed for stronger place-based governance. The final review and ‘Impact Party’ both indicate that this engagement has helped to bridge silos, reconnect colleagues and sustain conversations that had previously stalled.



Photo: John, Caitlin and Charlotte at the Sprint impact workshop

“The Sprint’s emphasis on genuine co-design from the outset, rather than policy engagement as an afterthought, aligned closely with my own perspectives about best practice approaches to research at the science-policy interface. The value of this approach was reflected in the access and insights we were offered in the policy space and the resulting value of the emergent results to both academic and policy interests.”

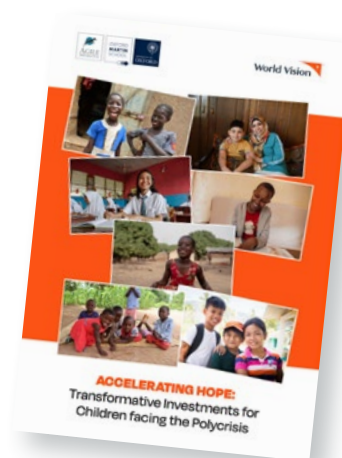
Charlotte Boddy | Researcher on Place-based Governance Sprint



How can we prevent childhood sexual abuse in climate disasters?

Read: [Drought exposure and the risk of sexual, emotional, and physical violence against adolescents in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Lesotho: an observational study](#)

With input from external partners including The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, UNICEF, IFRC and UNFPA, this Sprint addressed a critical policy and evidence gap from the underexplored intersection between climate disasters and child sexual abuse in Sub-Saharan Africa. The research combined climate modelling, epidemiology and social science analysis to provide a robust evidence base capable of informing humanitarian and climate-policy discussions. Findings revealed strong associations between drought and increased risk of childhood sexual violence, particularly affecting adolescent girls and children experiencing poverty and food insecurity, and that current climate adaptation and humanitarian systems are currently insufficiently equipped to address child protection risks. The Sprint's impact extended beyond generating new evidence: it strengthened the evidence base for future climate and child protection work, opened new data and research partnerships, and influenced policy and guidance through early engagement with UN agencies, governments and humanitarian actors.



How can curriculum designers provide better Net Zero education for the next generation?

Read: [Net Zero Education Framework](#)

This Sprint worked with the Department for Education, teachers in schools across England, a Youth Advisory Board and experts on Net Zero across Oxford to develop a Net Zero Education framework and to generate evidence to inform how curriculum designers and policymakers can better support Net Zero education in secondary schools. The Sprint team found that Net Zero is rarely taught explicitly within English secondary schools despite growing policy relevance and public importance. Teacher understanding of Net Zero is often limited, and many lack confidence in defining or teaching the concept. Findings also demonstrated that effective Net Zero education requires interdisciplinary teaching that connects environmental, economic, social, political and technological dimensions of climate action, and engages students with possible solutions. The Sprint is already translating research into practice: teachers reported increased confidence in teaching Net Zero, with one multi-academy trust of ten schools now developing a dedicated Net Zero geography unit inspired by the project. Its findings have also begun to inform wider curriculum development and policy discussions, including through engagement with the Department for Education.



How can we assess macroeconomic & inequality impacts of carbon budgets?

Read: [Complexity economics insights for the Seventh Carbon Budget](#)

The opportunity to influence decision-making on the UK's Seventh Carbon Budget (CB7) was the policy opportunity that drove this Sprint. Through a close partnership with and secondment into the research team from DESNZ, the Sprint developed new methods to assess the macroeconomic impacts of carbon budgets. The team's agent-based modelling approach enabled macroeconomic and inequality considerations to be brought into questions about how emissions reductions are allocated across the economy. Preliminary results suggest that CB7 results in GDP growth, with net neutral impacts on inflation and unemployment. The Sprint's impact went beyond developing a new model: its evidence and analysis fed directly into DESNZ's CB7 Impact Assessment, while sustained briefings and collaboration helped build confidence around the recommended emissions target. The partnership also helped establish agent-based modelling as a new area of interest across government, creating a cross-government network and opening opportunities for further research and funding.

“Routine conversations at both a working level and a senior level have enabled the most impactful work [to be] done. Informal meetings and Teams messages unblock technical queries whilst monthly senior meetings provide strategic steers on which policy questions to prioritise. ... I have been inspired by the Agile Initiative's drive to ensure projects have clear, impactful outputs.”

Tim Lennox | Researcher on Carbon Budgets Sprint and civil servant at the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero



How can the UK improve flood resilience in the Thames Estuary?

Read: [Learning unresolved coastal dynamics in hydrodynamic models](#)

Working with the Environment Agency and a Met Office–National Oceanography Centre consortium, this Sprint developed a new framework and tools to strengthen operational flood forecasting. The approach augments existing physics-based forecasts used to support operation of the Thames Barrier and provides a clearer picture of how flood risk may evolve over time, both central to the Thames Estuary 2100 Plan. Designed for wider national application, the framework can be adapted to local conditions and used alongside operational experience and local knowledge, helping decision-makers strengthen flood resilience and long-term adaptation planning.



How can we fireproof the Amazon?

Read: [Combate aos incêndios florestais na Amazonia / Combating forest fires in the Amazon](#)

Responding to calls from Brazilian decision-makers following the severe 2023–24 fire seasons, this Sprint brought together expertise in ecology, remote sensing and social science to develop practical approaches to reduce escalating fire risk across the Amazon. Working with the Brazilian Ministry of the Environment, local fire brigades and other stakeholders, the team combined research with policy and practitioner knowledge to identify priorities for prevention and response. Findings were presented at COP30 and through an event with the Brazilian Embassy in Oxford. A practical fire-combat booklet was produced and disseminated to local fire brigades across the Amazon. To improve accessibility, the booklet includes QR codes linking to audio narration in Portuguese.



“As a public servant, I believe that we have a lot of empirical knowledge that we acquire from communities and territories, but there is a lack of systematisation of this information, and I believe that the production of [this Sprint’s booklet] comes precisely in this sense, to be able to unify so much knowledge from different territories within the Amazon in a single place.”

Bianca Coelho | Partner on Fireproofing the Amazon Sprint, Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation

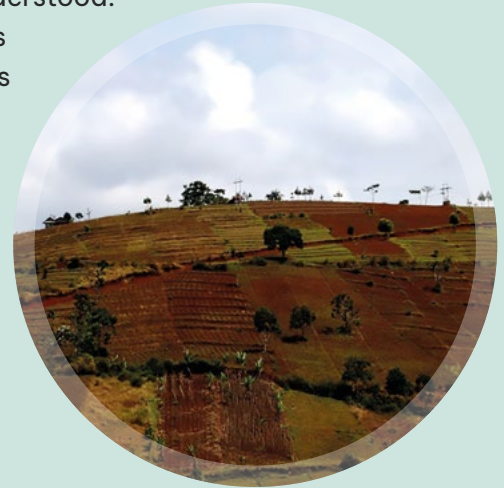


Forest-food nexus in global value chains – how can action on deforestation in producing countries strengthen the UK’s food system security and resilience?

Read: [Policy brief \[forthcoming\]](#)

Deforestation in producer countries can create severe socioeconomic and ecological risks that travel through global supply chains, yet the implications for UK food security remain poorly understood.

Focusing on Brazilian soy and Ghanaian cocoa, this Sprint combined trade analysis, systematic reviews and stakeholder engagement to examine how different deforestation-control pathways affect production, livelihoods, trade and exposure to supply shocks. Close collaboration with Defra helped shape analytical narratives and preliminary risk frameworks for understanding how these cascading risks could be anticipated and managed.



Environment and national security: Exploring policy ‘demand signals’ and the science response

Read: [Forward-looking research agenda](#)

This Sprint tested how universities can identify and respond rapidly to emerging policy ‘demand signals’ in a fast-changing geopolitical and environmental context. Through close engagement with policymakers across government, defence and national security, researchers from a wide range of disciplines identified priority questions at the intersection of climate, nature and security. Rapid evidence syntheses explored six areas: critical natural infrastructure; food and energy security; shipping and trade; environment-driven migration; weaponisation of nature; and societal resilience. The team also developed a conceptual framework tracing how environmental change can generate cascading risks to UK security, alongside an assessment of how these risks are currently understood across government. The work culminated in a forward-looking research agenda of almost 200 questions and a set of over 50 potential policy interventions, providing a basis for more coordinated research and action on emerging environmental-security risks.





Science-to-policy projects

Read: [Science-to-policy projects \(2026\)](#)

Understanding the contribution of water industry environmental spending to financing nature in the UK consulted industry professionals and experts on investment in nature through the water industry national environment programme. Read: [Nature finance within the Water Industry National Environment Programme \(WINEP\)](#)

Green approaches to public procurement: International insights produced a white paper on barriers and opportunities associated with sustainable public procurement in consultation with national and international policymakers and experts. Read: [Procurement for the planet: Policy approaches to greening public spending \(Report forthcoming\)](#)

A roadmap for UK beans: Releasing beans' potential for net-zero, nature and nutrition tested system-level levers on the agronomic and food-system conditions under which beans can deliver environmental and nutritional value in the UK. Read: [Co-developing a UK pulses roadmap: Releasing pulses' potential for nutrition, nature and net-zero](#)

Building high-integrity nature markets through people, place, and partnerships explored integrity not only as a technical issue, but a socio-ecological and political one through interviews and workshops (Report forthcoming)

The social and environmental dimensions of UK Critical Minerals – A rapid assessment, policy stock-take and research agenda highlighted that there is insufficient understanding in the UK of the social and environmental risks associated with critical minerals projects. Read: [The social and environmental dimensions of critical minerals in the UK: A policy discussion and evidence review](#)

“My go-to analogy for Agile’s mission is that it’s trying to do what the Covid vaccine did: create an expedited process to deliver what’s needed to those who need it when it’s needed. Agile has not just shown that you can deliver primary research within a year, but also that you can deliver outcomes and impacts in a very short timeframe, too.”

Lucy Rodwell | Impact Facilitator at the Agile Initiative

Researching the experiment

Alongside the Sprint projects, we have been undertaking research at the programme level, exploring the opportunities and challenges associated with doing environmental research this way.

A wealth of data from Sprint reports, outputs, surveys, interviews and observations with researchers, partners, decision-makers and administrators has fed into longitudinal, mixed-methods evaluative research. Our approach is both deliberate and organic, with lines of enquiry drawing from the programme's overarching framework and emerging from the data.

“Our programme-level study of Agile Sprints demonstrates that Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) can, and should, become embedded across environmental research as more than compliance documents, enriching the approach and quality of sprint-style academic work.”

Dr Jennifer Dodsworth | Research Fellow, Agile Initiative

Evaluating the Agile model

A final analysis will review all the Sprint cohorts, from the pioneers to the last projects of 2026. The diversity of Sprints, varying in time, size, research topics, policy angles, academic disciplines and partners involved will provide insight into how to make research more responsive and achieve impact across different spheres. Surveys and interviews delve into who was involved and why, what was achieved for policy and practice, skills gained and career impacts, what works and what does not.

Initial data from 2023–2024 showed that most researchers and partners considered their Sprint a success, valuing the interdisciplinarity and collaboration. Many researchers highlighted the positives of working on projects which took impact and policy-pull seriously, and which offered leadership opportunities, new networks and skills in policy research. On the other hand, the tight timelines could be stressful, short contracts amplified researcher precarity and it was hard to balance production of academic papers necessary for career development with policy-focused outputs.

We look forward to sharing what emerges from the full data set in 2027.



Our publications

● The Our Approach series

- Interdisciplinarity
- Equality impact assessments
- Co-creation
- Theory of change
- Managing rapid research projects

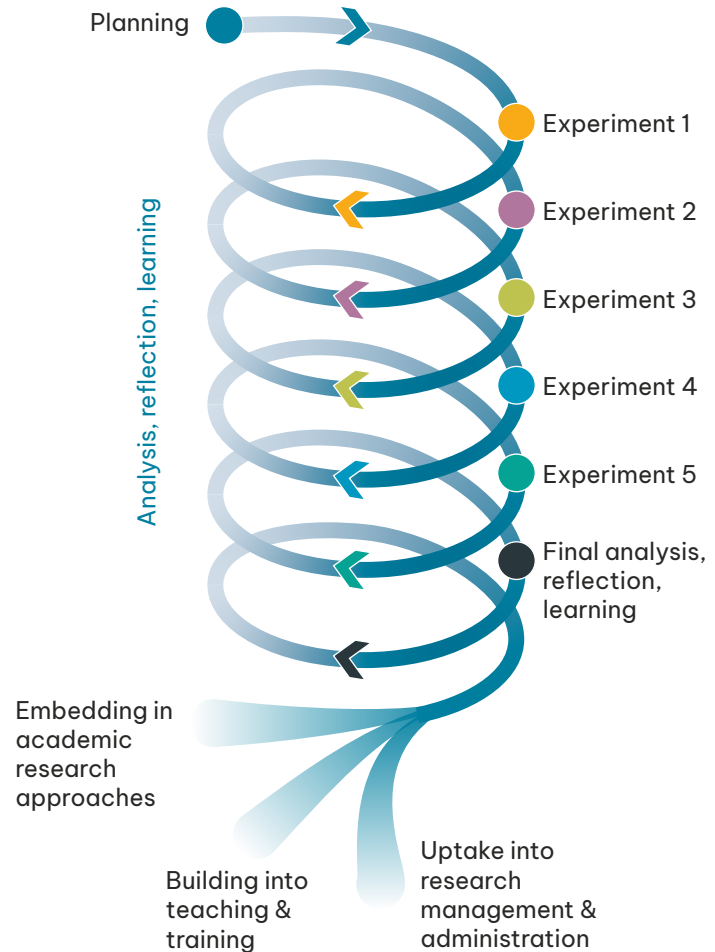
- The role of publics and deliberation
- Impact and collaboration in environmental research
- Beyond speed: Designing science-policy collaborations that work with real-world rhythms
- Agile equity: A mixed-methods study of Equality Impact Assessments in an environmental research programme [forthcoming in 2027]
- Beyond acceleration: Rhythmic dynamics at the science-policy interface [forthcoming in 2027]
- Science-policy in a time of emergency (evaluating Agile) [forthcoming in 2027]



Acting on learning

We're not just analysing from the outside. Agile has been characterised by a continuous learning spiral, where analysis and reflection from each phase of the experiment have fed into the design of the next phase. Throughout, the Agile team of academics and research professionals has worked closely together to pause, reflect, adapt and act. This has been enabled by continuous monitoring of progress against programme objectives, and a willingness to rethink and adapt based on feedback and suggestions from peers.

This collaborative approach has produced a wealth of guidance material for supporting this type of research.



● **Photo: The programme research team:**
(left to right) Mark, Pete, Jen, and John



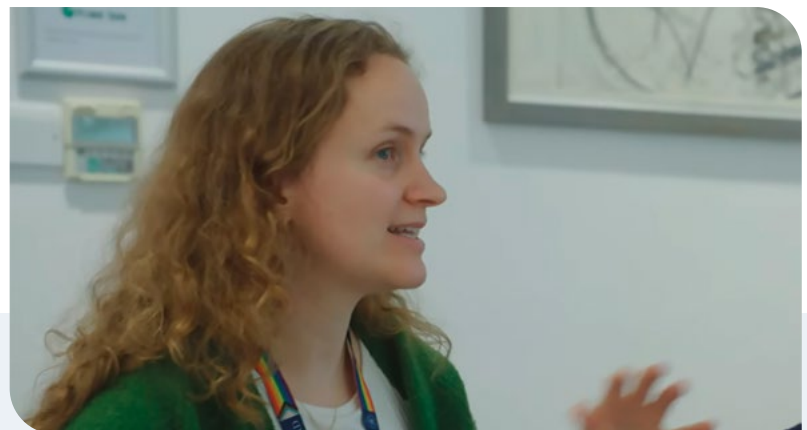
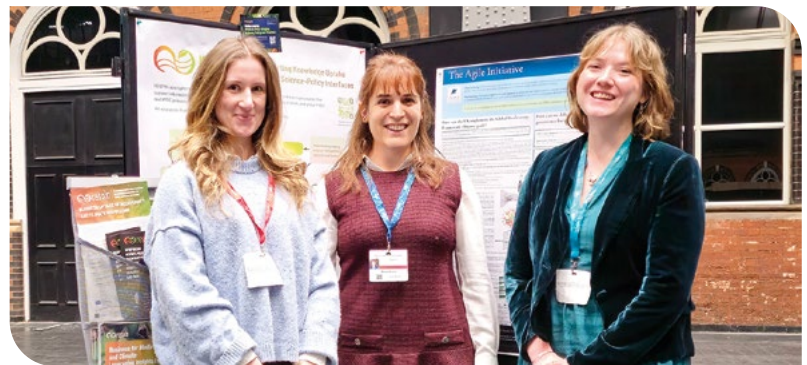


Our community

Agile became a distributed interconnected community spanning disciplines, career stages, professional services and decision-making organisations. This network was more than the sum of individual Sprint teams: it allowed expertise and experience to circulate between projects, created opportunities for collective learning, and helped build capability for policy-engaged interdisciplinary research across Oxford.



● Photos: Signposting the Agile Summer School in 2023; The Agile Showcase in 2025; Sprint researchers at London Climate Action Week 2026; and The Agile Summer School in 2023.



● Clockwise from top: Mattia Troiano at a conference; Pete at an Agile programme research and learning workshop; Sprint researchers at IPBES-2026; Jessica at a Sprint meeting; Lucy presenting at the OPEN networking day 2025; Sprint trip to FAI Farms in Wytham 2025; and Jing and Jen on the Oxford University stand at the Oxford Real Farming Conference in 2026.

Looking ahead

Over the coming months we will publish papers, reports and recommendations on which principles and enabling conditions may be transferable, how they can be adapted, and where different contexts require different approaches.

What the Agile experience has taught us (so far)

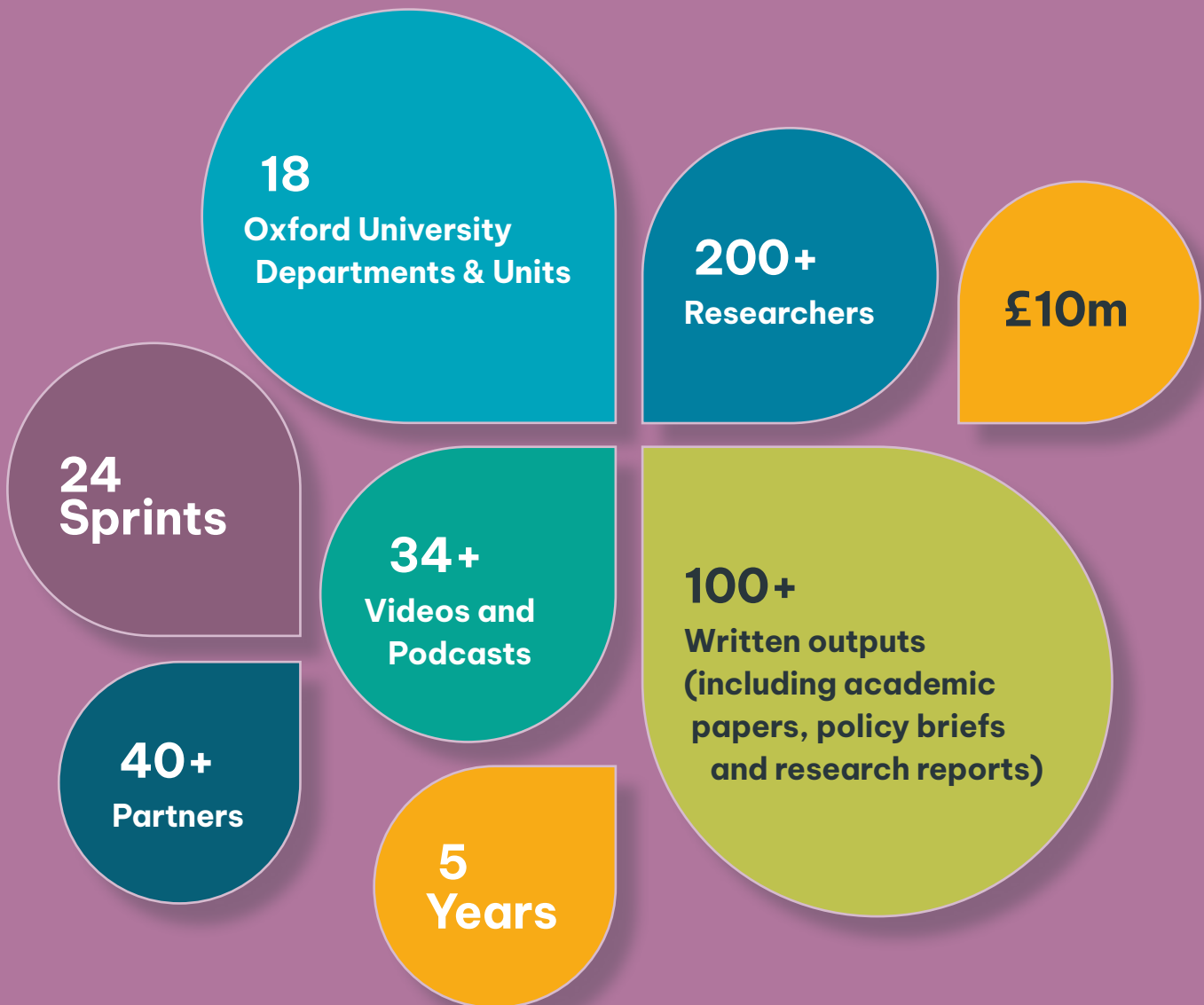
- Some policy questions can be addressed rapidly; others require research that cannot responsibly be compressed.
- Strong policy demand can improve relevance, but good research also requires critical independence.
- Policy impact is often cumulative and relational, making influence and contribution easier to establish than simple attribution and impact.
- Individual Sprints may be short; the relationships that enable them often take much longer to build.
- Interdisciplinary research requires active integration and facilitation.
- Equity, diversity and inclusion need to be designed into research processes from the outset, including who participates, whose knowledge is recognised, how collaboration is organised and whether opportunities are genuinely accessible.
- Working in rapid, interdisciplinary and policy-engaged ways asks researchers to develop capabilities that conventional academic training does not always provide. Dedicated support, mentoring, skills development and opportunities for researchers are therefore part of the infrastructure required for this kind of research.
- Flexible funding matters, as does the professional infrastructure that enables teams to use it.
- Different decision contexts require different approaches: the Agile experience offers principles to test and adapt rather than a universal template.

As the formal programme ends, our aim is to carry these lessons into the wider research system, and to continue testing them in the different contexts in which universities seek to contribute to urgent societal challenges.

“I am optimistic that Agile’s Sprint methodology will make a lasting contribution to diversifying our modes of research, particularly where pressing policy decisions require the latest research insights. This change will most likely come through Agile’s cadre of researchers who will go on to embed the best practice of Agile in their ongoing research collaborations.”

Professor Patrick Grant FREng | PI, Agile Initiative;
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), University of Oxford

Agile in numbers (so far)



Agile in disciplines

Geography Biology Ecology Earth sciences Law
 Medical sciences Psychiatry Social policy Physics
 International development Economics Mathematics
 History Political science Engineering science Education
 Computer sciences Anthropology Transport studies

Who we are

People

Abdul Wahid Khan	Dania Albini	Jimena Alvarez	Michael Keith
Achim Steiner	David Pyle	Jimmy Moneron	Michael Obersteiner
Aduke Onafowoken	Diogo Gaspar Vessimo	Jing Zhang	Michael Ruggeri
Aidong Yang	Dong-Luu Tran	JinHo Chung	Michelle Jackson
Aissa Dearing	Doyme Farmer	Jo House	Mike Clark
Aki Yamaguchi	EJ Milner Gulland	Joe Boyle	Mike Kendall
Alexis McGivern	Elizabeth Button	Joe Bull	Millie Sutton
Alice Stuart	Emilien Ravigné	Joe Cartwright	Minna Ots
Aline Soterroni	Emily Warner	Joel-Pascal Ntwali-N'Konzi	Molly James
Alison Curry	Emma Bailey	Johannah Latchem	Mona Ibrahim
Alison Smith	Emma Lecavalier	Johannes Lumma	Monika Zurek
Allison deVries	Emma O'Donnell	John Ingram	Myles Allen
Amber Butler	Erika Berenguer	John Lynch	Nameerah Khan
Amelia Farber	Ewan Archer-Brown	Jordan Kemp	Natalie Duffus
Ana-Maria Niculcea	Felix Eigenbrod	Jos Barlow	Nathalia Carvalho
Andrew Wilson	Grace Wright-Arora	Joseph Asplet	Nathalie Seddon
Ane Alencar	Hannah Nicholas	Joss Wright	Neil Hart
Anna Rufas Blanco	Hannah Van Vijfeijken	Joice Ferreira	Nick Salmon
Anupama Sen	Hasan Musleman	Juan Sabuco	Nick Sidwell
Apostolos Tsiachristas	Heather Bouman	Julia Bator	Nicola Ranger
Asli Salihoglu	Heather Stallard	Karla Perez	Nina Song
Audrey Wagner	Heather Viles	Katie Lois Hutchinson	Owen Lewis
Ben Groom	Hiba Baroud	Katrin Wilhelm	Paolo Andrich
Ben Surridge	Hugo Slim	Kim Polgreen	Patrick Grant
Benjamin Wagenvoort	Iain Williams	Kok Siew Ng	Paul Behrens
Bhawana Gupta	Ian Bateman	Laure Cesari	Paul Shearing
Bob Smith	Ian Boyd	Lorraine Redwood	Pete Smith
Bothaina Eltigani	Ian Thompson	Louise Gordon	Peter Barbrook-Johnson
Brendon Tankwa	Ilina Singh	Louise Selisny	Philip Campbell
Caitlin Hafferty	Isabelle Bond	Lubasi Limweta	Pirta Palola
Cameron Hepburn	Isobel Hawkins	Lucie Cluver	Purusothmn Nair
Carlo Palazzi	Isobel Talks	Lucy Rodwell	Rachel Hayman
Cecilia Larrosa	Jackie Turner	Malini Kallingal	Rebecca Collins
Charles Godfray	James Robson	Mandy Phuti	Rene Bañares-Alcántara
Charlotte Boddy	James Tilhomole	Marcela Lopes Alves	Richard Grenyer
Chris Thorogood	Jamie Hinch	Mark Hirons	Richard Kipling
Claire Craig	Janina Jochim	Martin Bounds	Richard Nayak-Luke
Claudia Coleoni	Jasper Verschuur	Martje Koppen	Robin Smale
Colin Mayer	Jennifer Dodsworth	Mary Jane Attenburow	Rodger Caseby
Constance McDermott	Jessica Lorimer	Mattia Mancini	Roger Sykes
Coralia Cartis	Jill Shatz	Mattia Troiano	Ros Rickaby
Dani Shahzada	Jim Hall		Rosie Everett

Rosie Hails	Sophus zu Ermgassen	Thomas Monahan	Valentina Antonaccio
Ruth Mattock	Sopuruchukwu Obiesie	Thomas O'Callaghan-Brown	Vidya Narayanan
Saba Arshad	Steph Perrin	Thomas To hung Tsui	Viola Martin
Saher Hasnain	Stephen Roberts	Tim Lennox	Wei Zhang
Sally Medley	Steve Puttick	Tim Schwanen	William Finnegan
Samar Khatiwala	Steve Smith	Timothy Clack	William Rudgard
Samuel Fankhauser	Tamsin Blaxter	Timothy Randazzo	Xiao Zhang
Sarah Gall	Tanita Casci	Tina Fawcett	Yadvinder Malhi
Sasha Menon	Tara Garnett	Tom Atkins	Yajju Pradhan
Seth Flaxman	Tatenda Mugwendere	Tom Kettlety	Zach Posnik
Sharron Pleydell-Pearce	Thara Chandran	Tom Youngman	
Silinga Dzumbunu	Thijs Ter Horst	Tony Juniper	
Siyanai Zhou	Thomas Adcock		

Partners

3Keel	Food Foundation	Orsted
Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office	Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership
Aqua Enviro	Go-Science	Oxfordshire Schools Sustainability Network
Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust	Good Food Oxford	Royal Botanic Gardens (Kew)
Biffa	Green Alliance	The Ammonia Energy Association
Brazilian Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change	Green Finance Institute	The Cabinet Office
British Geological Survey	HM Treasury	The Climate Change Committee
CEFAS	Highlands Rewilding	The Office for Environmental Protection
Cenergia Lab from Graduate School of Engineering (COPPE) of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ)	Ikon Science Ltd	The National Trust
Crown Estate	Instituto de Pesquisa Ambiental da Amazonia (IPAM)	The National Farmers Union
David Ross Educational Trust	International Finance Team (DEFRA)	The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Department for Education	Lancaster University	The RSPB
Department for Energy Security and Net Zero	Leicestershire County Council	The UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Lloyd's Register	The UK Climate Change Committee
Department for Transport	Ministry of Defence (Army, Navy, RAF)	The Wildlife Trusts
Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (University of Kent)	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government	Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment
Embrapa	Mott MacDonald	UK Health Security Agency
Environment Agency	Natural England	UK Met Office
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (NI)	Natural Resources Wales	University of Cape Town
	Nature Markets Team (DEFRA)	University of Exeter
	NeurOx YPAG	University of Southampton
	North Sea Transition Authority	WWF-UK
	OceanMind Ltd	

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