

‘Research culture’ in the UK Higher Education sector

NARMA conference
Lillestrøm, Norway
12th March 2024

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UNIVERSITY OF HULL

- Founded in 1927 and is England's 14th oldest University
- Located in East Yorkshire in the city of Kinston-Upon-Hull
- ~15,000 students (2021/22 ~70% UG; 30% PG)
- €14.8m annual research income (~16% is EU funding)
- REF2021 - 82% of our research is recognised as world-leading or internationally excellent (4*+3*).
- Best known for developing liquid-crystal technology, for which we received the Queen's Award for Technological Achievement.

The University has particular research expertise and focus on addressing the following challenges :

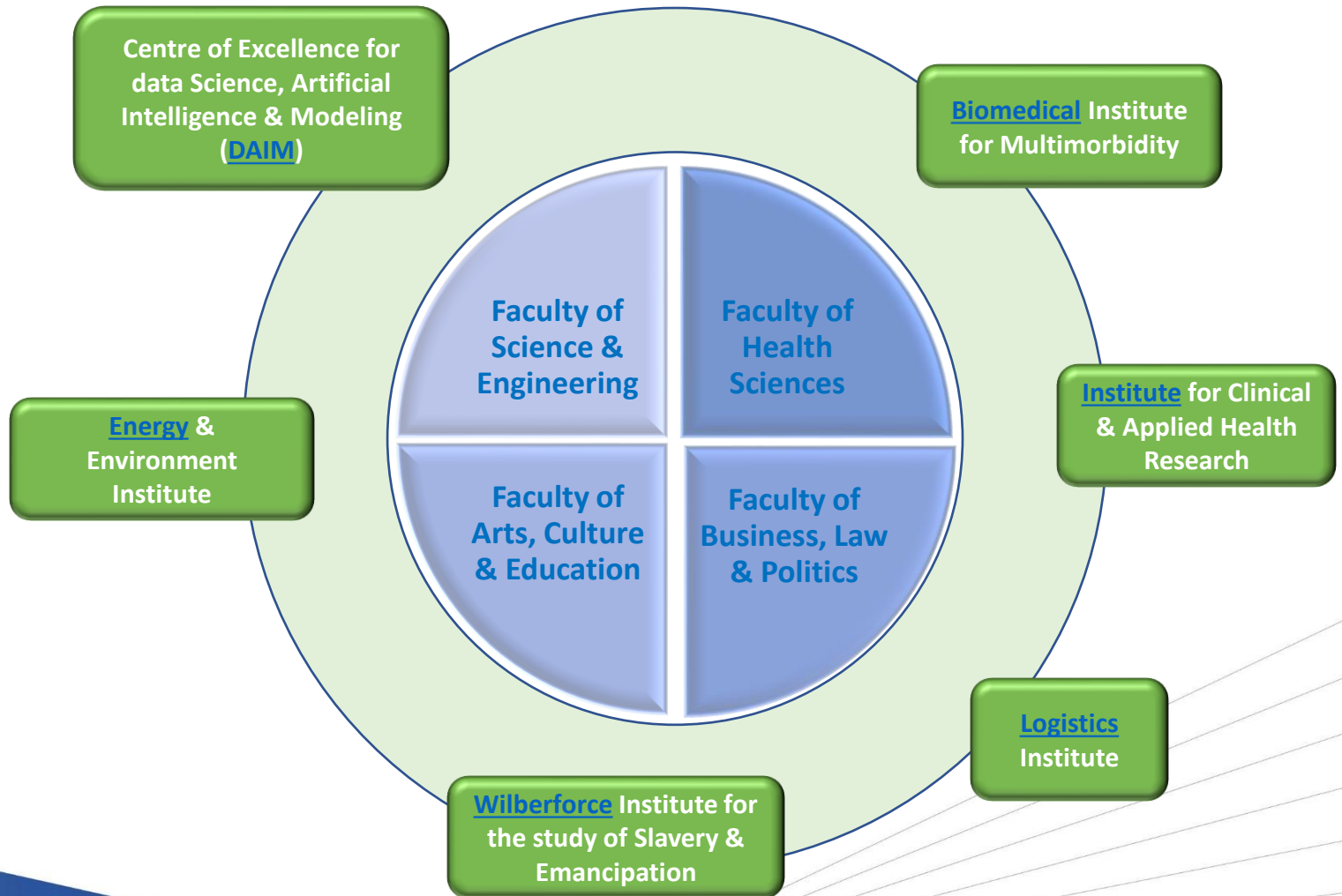
- **Accelerating a net zero future**
- **Enhancing heritage and creative industries**
- **Improving health outcomes**
- **Living with water**
- **Promoting justice and fairness for all**





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What is meant by ‘research culture’ ?

Of course, the concept of a research culture is as old as ‘research’ and ‘science’.

However, only recently has ‘research culture’ become a coherent concept in research and higher education policy.

‘Research culture encompasses the behaviours, values, expectations, attitudes and norms of our research communities. It influences researchers’ career paths and determines the way that research is conducted and communicated’ ([Royal Society](#) 2016)

PART ONE:


Research culture' in the UK:

- Why now?
- The changing landscape of the UK University research sector

Gethin Owen - Researcher & Innovation Development Manager



Drivers behind emergence of 'research culture'

- I. Changes to funding of universities
 - II. Global competitiveness and talent attraction and retention.
 - III. Wellbeing, EDI and harassment/bullying in research environments
 - IV. Evaluation (and REF)
- 

Changes to the funding of universities & research

- Universities historically funded by a UK government block grants.
However, government spending reviews through the 90's resulted in changes to how Universities would be funded:
 - September 1998 tuition fees introduced £1,000 pa, 2006/07 £3,000 pa and 2010 £9,000 pa.
 - Currently £9,250 pa with 76% of all institutes charging full rate
- 2005 Full Economic Cost (fEC) methodology introduced to cost research projects.
 - UK Research Councils fund at 80% of fEC
- Resulted in fees-reliant system and competition between institutions (rankings etc.), away from full cost covering block grants with tuition fees subsidising research.
- Teaching and education prioritised
- Research still funded by dual support method
 - Strategic institutional funding (block grant) based on REF results
 - Project-specific grants (competitive)

Global competitiveness & talent attraction & retention.

- 2016 vote for UK withdrawal from EU – Brexit (actual 31/01/20)
 - EU students studying in UK dropped by 50% since Brexit
 - Involvement with Horizon Europe significant impacted
 - UK less attractive to EU/international researchers
 - However, UK's now negotiated Association status welcomed but will take time to recover!
- UK ambition to be a 'science superpower' affected.
- Investment not matching ambition, with push towards further and technical skills.



Wellcome - What researchers think about the culture they work in

([15/01/2020](#))

In-depth interviews (94), co-creation workshops and online survey (4,267) of researchers (academia 84%, industry 12% & healthcare 2%) to understand researchers experience of research culture.

Key findings:

- Researchers were passionate and proud about their work, but have concerns about job security
- Poor research culture was leading to unhealthy competition, bullying and harassment, and mental health issues
- There's a disconnect between researchers' perception of their management skills and their abilities in practice
- The system favours quantity over quality, and creativity is often stifled

The Research Excellence Framework (REF): UK's system for assessing the excellence of research in UK higher education (2014; 2021, ~~2028~~ 2029)

REF informs the allocation of ~£2 billion per year of public funding for universities' research.

REF 2021 assessed:

- **Outputs** (60% weighting) – originality, significance & rigour
- **Impact Case Studies** (25% weighting) - significance and reach
- **Research Environment** (15% weighting) - vitality and sustainability.

Changes to REF 2029:

- **Contribution to knowledge & understanding** (50% weighting) expands on outputs with 10% of score based on broader contribution to the advancement of the discipline
- **Engagement & impact** (25% weighting) consists of both impact case studies and evidence of engagement and impact activity beyond case studies.
- **People & culture** (25% weighting) replaces environment and will include an assessment of research culture.

In summary:

“the pursuit of a narrow definition of research excellence, and of excellence at any cost, has limited the research endeavour and had an adverse impact on the wellbeing of researchers as well as the quality and reliability of the research they undertake.” ([Casci & Adams, eLife 2020](#))

PART TWO:

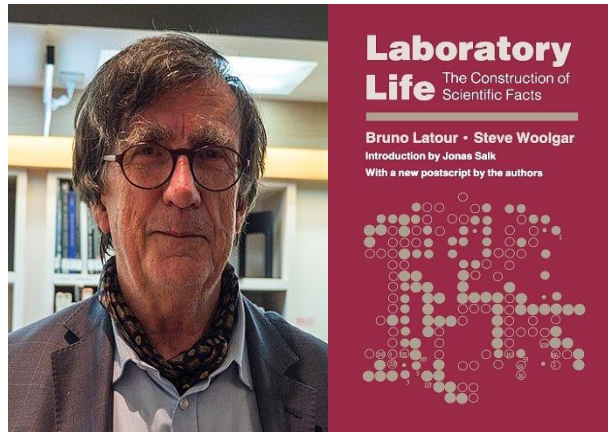
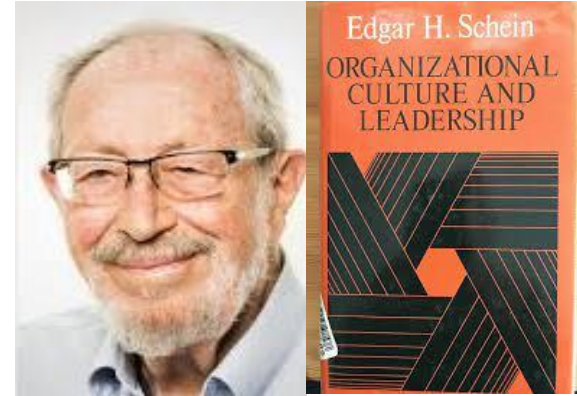
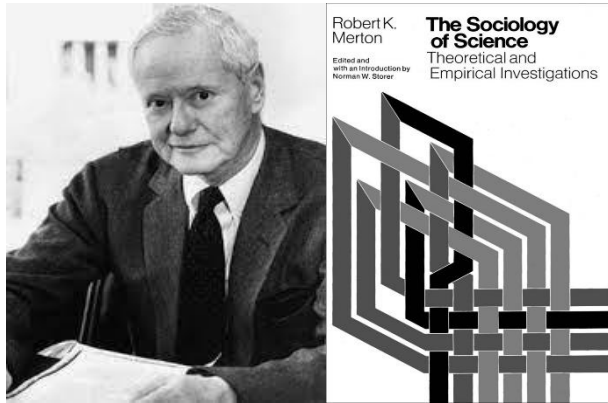
‘Research Culture’ in UK research policy, 2016-24

Dr Nick Mithen - Researcher Development & Culture Manager



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The origins of “research culture”, since 1940



“Research culture” in UK research policy

Only since 2016 has ‘research culture’ become a coherent concept in research and higher education policy.



THE ROYAL SOCIETY

“Research culture encompasses the behaviours, values, expectations, attitudes and norms of our research communities. It influences researchers’ career paths and determines the way that research is conducted and communicated.” (Royal Society, 2016)



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'Research culture' in UK research policy (2017-20)

2015 - [Nosek et.al. 'Promoting an open research culture', SCIENCE, 2015](#)



2016-18 – The Royal Society's '[Changing Expectations](#)' project, publishing '[Research culture: embedding inclusive excellence](#)'



2019-20 – The Wellcome Trust's '[Reimagining Research](#)' project, publishing '[What Researchers think of the culture they work in](#)' report



Since 2019 - A small number of leading universities begin institutional programmes of work on research culture





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'Research culture' in UK research policy (2021-24)

2021 - Russell Group publishes '[Realising our Potential: Backing Talent and Strengthening UK Research Culture and Environment](#)'

**RUSSELL
GROUP**

2021 - UK government's [R&D People and Culture Strategy](#)



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

2021- - Research England funding institutions directly to enhance research culture (from [2021-22](#); [2022-23](#); [2023-25](#))



Research
England

2023 – Beginning process of [incorporating 'Research Culture' into REF28 REF29](#); extended in 2024 through [consultative project](#).

REF2029

Research Excellence Framework

Since 2021 – More, and wider range, of universities develop institutional programmes on 'research culture'



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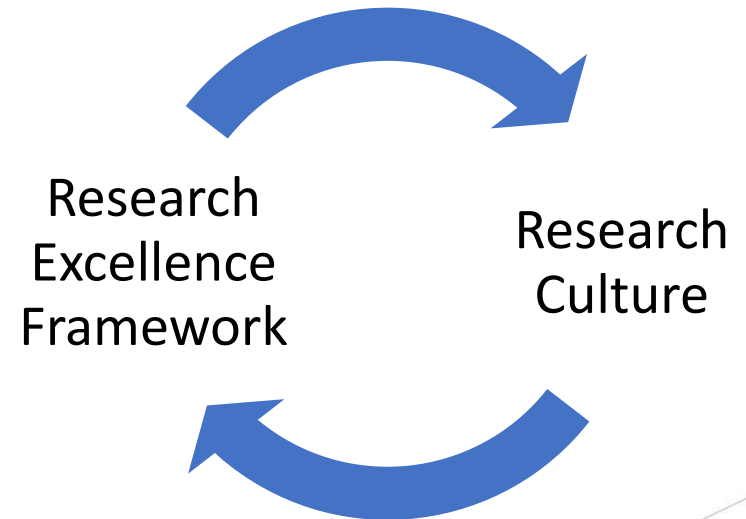




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Research culture and research assessment

- 'Research culture' emerged as a priority from 2016 *in response* to what was perceived as a flawed research environment.
- In part, this flawed environment was caused by how the UK has assessed research excellence through the Research Excellence Framework.
- For 2029 REF will incorporate research culture into its assessment framework.
- This has implications for both 'research culture' and 'research assessment' in the UK.



What we are doing at the University of Hull.

- Building structures: dedicated 'research culture' team with senior academic lead; institutional open research lead; strengthening academic networks.
- Consulting internally: surveys, focus groups and interviews.
- Analysing the sector: building our responsiveness to a shifting policy landscape.
- Strategic planning: developing a 'Hull Research Culture Action Plan' (2024-29) aligned with research and knowledge exchange strategy.
- Prioritising, and delivering change:
 - Facilitating TIME for research.
 - Strengthening SUPPORT for researcher career development
 - Enabling COLLABORATION.
 - Enhancing, and recognizing, RESPONSIBLE RESEARCH PRACTICES.

Measuring research culture

REF 2029



Research Excellence Framework

“A project has now been commissioned with Technopolis and CRAC-Vitae in collaboration with a number of sector organisations, which will develop indicators to be used for the assessment of PCE. The project team will engage extensively with the research community to co-develop a shortlist of indicators to be used to evidence and support institutions’ PCE submissions as part of a structured questionnaire for REF submissions.”, Jan. 2024.

POLITICAL SCIENCE BLOG 26 JUL 2023

REF 2028: How do you measure culture?

By Grace Gottlieb

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WONKHE ABOUT US• EVENTS LATEST• JOBS• SUBSCRIPTION• SUS•  

To measure research culture, start with what you value

The next challenge for research culture is establishing agreement on the indicators to use. Sarah Whalley and Candy Rowe share their experience

COMMENT | 1/03/24

ELIZABETH GADD | COMMENT | 28/06/23

WONKHE

My research culture is better than yours

With a new REF emphasis on research culture, Elizabeth Gadd asks how we can make this element as equitable as possible



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Thank you 😊

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