

Café Culture Workshops for Research Enabling Professionals – Provocations

1. Source material:

- TALENT Commission, Survey of UK Technical Staff March (2021): <https://www.technicians.org.uk/>
- PraxisAuril survey of KE Professionals (2018): <https://www.praxisauril.org.uk/resource/state-ke-profession-survey-2018>
- ARMA survey of research professionals (2020): <https://arma.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ARMA-Research-Culture-Survey-2020.pdf>
- ARMA Research Office Benchmarking (2020) – Issues and Challenges: <https://zenodo.org/record/3935976#.YfkbHerP1nI>
- Understanding perceptions of the Research Excellence Framework among UK researchers, RANDEurope, (2021): <https://repository.jisc.ac.uk/8542/1/understanding-perceptions-of-the-research-excellence-framework-among-uk-researchers.pdf>

2. Comments and statistics to provoke discussion

A: Perceived contribution or relationship to research culture

<i>I don't feel qualified to comment on research culture.</i>
<i>Research Culture is not a concept that is talked about at [clerical grades].</i>
<i>We're a support team, the research culture is elsewhere.</i>

B: Recognition and reward

<i>A range of roles contribute to research ideas, assist in solving problems and analyse and interpret data. How is this work recognised?</i>
<i>Sometimes research managers feel 'invisible', that their skills, expertise and contributions are not always valued, and that successes in which they have played a part are often attributed entirely to academic colleagues.</i>
<i>The skills, expertise and experience of...non-academic staff are often valued less than those of academic staff, even where the expertise of the former is more relevant than the latter.</i>
<i>Research enabling staff are not recognised as experts in their own right with a particular skill set to offer.</i>
<i>We talk about research as a team sport, but it often doesn't feel like there's a team reward at the end.</i>



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C: On changing workloads/burden

Stern had the laudable aim of saving us time and reducing the bureaucratic burden, but it just hasn't happened. [Instead] the burden has shifted from academics to those managing the exercise.

Pervasive restructuring – over 80% of research directors have experienced restructuring in recent years and half anticipate structural changes in the next 12 months.

There is an increased expectation from [research and KE] funders and growing compliance and regulatory burden.

D: Relationship between research enabling and research active staff

Senior University Leaders should always be academics.

Research-enabling staff need to be empowered to hold others accountable.

Research active and research enabling staff should be equally represented on committees relating to research governance.

The further away from academic staff you work, the less you are valued.

There needs to be a 'we' culture, not a 'them and us' culture.

Support for [research enabling staff] largely comes from other [research enablers] rather than the community as a whole.

A totally impartial system that recognises and supports any staff that can contribute to the research input should be considered.

You've got to get an academic to champion things as it gives it more weight.

There is prejudice about the academic level and towards professional support staff. Some are held in higher regard due to seniority but not knowledge of the topic.

A lot of work [goes] unnoticed, or [is] taken for granted, even though it would have an impact on the functioning of other work, whereas if something went wrong, they were often blamed, or expected to fix it, even if it was beyond their remit.

E: Professional Development

There is a whole team focussed on researcher development; where's the team focussed on research professionals' development?

I have access to opportunities for career promotion and progression

I am aware of a range of different career options (inside/outside of research management)

I really enjoy working in the [research enabling] environment but I find that there isn't enough top-level support for this activity.

As an experienced [research support] professional, I enjoy my career and find it incredibly interesting and rewarding.

Funders and employers...should recognise the blurring of boundaries between [enabling and] academic roles. They should provide opportunities and mechanisms to move between career pathways and across sectors.



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F: Behaviour and well-being issues

<i>I am satisfied with the way my institution handles performance issues or inappropriate behaviours.</i>
<i>There is lots of talk about supporting wellbeing but the fundamental issues around workload etc., which are causing distress are largely left ignored.</i>
<i>Culture is defined by the worst behaviour you're prepared to tolerate.</i>
<i>I, and many of my colleagues have been subject to rude, upsetting and sometimes abusive emails from other staff... It would be useful to establish a formal process of reporting such behaviour and making sure it is known to all university staff.</i>
<i>There needs to be a way of dealing with 'the untouchables' ('star' research-active staff who may exhibit toxic behaviours).</i>

Stakeholders

3. Proposed stakeholders set:

- Funders
- Government / Policy Makers
- Researcher & Innovators
- Research & Innovation Leaders
- Institutional Leadership – possibly PVC Research or PVC Innovation/Enterprise, Chairs of recruitment/promotion committees, etc.
- Professional Bodies/Sector organisations:
 - ARMA
 - PraxisAuril
 - PRISM
 - NCCPE
 - Technicians Initiatives
 - UPEN
 - Enterprise Educators(?)
- Mission Groups
- Directors of professional services, for example, Publishers (e.g. insisting use of [CRediT Contributor Roles Taxonomy](#) for all outputs)
- Self (the empowerment)

