Can we fix it? Are incremental tweaks to research practices, cultures & assessment sufficient, or is it time for more radical change?

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UKRIO Annual Conference, 25 May 2022
What I hope to cover in 25 mins:

1. The ‘cultural turn’ in UK research policy
2. Progress we’ve seen...
3. Paradoxes of the pandemic
4. The yawning chasm between rhetoric & lived reality – our new “valley of death”
5. A white, middle-class, able-bodied man in his late-40s losing patience in public
6. So yes, let’s talk about research cultures:
   - Material cultures
   - Cultures of honesty
   - Cultures of experimentation
   - Cultures of formative assessment
   - Cultures of creative chaos
The ‘cultural turn’ in UK research policy
Our vision: To advance practical and robust approaches to research assessment globally.

Campaigns & creativity from the grassroots

Jess Wade’s one-woman mission to diversify Wikipedia’s science stories

Our largest encyclopedia overwhelmingly represents the achievements of white men. For graduate student Wade, fighting this bias has been an uphill battle.

Cite Black Women

Welcome to the official site of the Cite Black Women movement!

Our Story

In December 2017, Thabiti-Leiis created Cite Black Women to campaign to teach people to bring to a radical practice of citation that acknowledges and honors Black women’s Transnational intellectual production. It is linked with a series of class exercises under the umbrella “Cite Black Women!” The initiative seeks to disseminate concerns but particularly in academia, to critically reflect on the everyday practice of citation and start to
Work still in progress...

R&D People and Culture Strategy
People at the heart of R&D

Science Minister on ‘The Research Landscape’

Amanda Sillway spoke at a Higher Education Policy Institute webinar about improving the way we evaluate research.

Delivered on: 20 October 2020 (Transcript of the speech, exactly as it was delivered)
"The scientific community spent the pre-pandemic years designing faster ways of doing experiments, sharing data, and developing vaccines, allowing it to mobilize quickly when COVID-19 emerged. Its goal now should be to address its many lingering weaknesses. Warped incentives, wasteful practices, overconfidence, inequality, a biomedical bias—COVID-19 has exposed them all. And in doing so, it offers the world of science a chance to practice one of its most important qualities: self-correction." *Ed Yong, The Atlantic*
Build back better?

UKRI accused of ‘cherry-picking’ evidence in PhD Covid response

By Sophie Inga

In March 2020, as COVID-19 spread and the global lockdown began, we announced a Society and Space (SAS) editorial design to “pause” our normal working practices (Edwards, 2020). Our announcement began:

Five readers of and contributors to Society and Space, the COVID-19 pandemic and the response of governments, institutions, and communities are naturally concerned. Many of us will be paying close attention to how power, discourse, governance, politics, resistance and difference are enacted and made manifest in the coming weeks and months.

Acknowledging increased care work, a climate of fear and uncertainty, and significant challenges in how scholars teach and do research, we stated that:

To continue as usual right now would be unsustainable and unethical. Capitalist globalization has not only broken our health systems, it has also broken our education systems. By pausing, we hope that we can change our working practices in a way that places: (永远可持续和发展) different ethos that recognises the challenges that our post-pandemic future will pose.

We then pledged to stop sending new submissions to review, halt automated reviewer reminders, and generally slow down operations for about a month, and to continue to assess our practices throughout the unfolding pandemic, always prioritizing solidarity and care. We looked at our manuscript with a special interest in Marianne Kelly’s message to “let the radicalise you, rather than hold you to despair.”

An managing editor of SAS. I have long meant to write with an update for our readers, authors, and reviewers. The more that has passed, though, the less capable I have felt of saying anything worthwhile, or at best of saying anything in the determined, hope-infused tone with which we wrote in 2020.

It will surely surprise no one that in the more than two years since our “pause”, editorial work has become far more than any pause challenging. We have done as we said we would do and adjusted our working practices in accordance with the realities. This
Between rhetoric & reality: a new R&D ‘valley of death’

I joined the S&L editorial team in 2009 – it is a mechanism for collegiality, curiosity, constructive critique, and generous engagement. As a labour practice, though, it is horribly flawed. Our former long-time editor Stuart Elden said as much in 2008, highlighting the difficulty of securing reviewer commitments and reporting and noting that, “something in this system is breaking down.” Back then, and indeed until the pandemic began, we generally had to send out six to eight invitations to get three reports, and reviewers occasionally regaled on their commitments or, more frequently, were a few weeks or so late due to unforeseen circumstances. Now, we even send out 10 to 15 reviewer invitations to yield even two reviewer commitments, and reports regularly come in months late with a hefty percentage never materializing at all. The system’s breakdown has greatly accelerated, in tune with the pandemic’s characteristic ability to widen pre-existing cracks into chasms.

In 2008, Stuart described peer review as an “exchange economy.” Acknowledging the problematic political economy of academic journal publishing (i.e. reviewing as unreimbursed labour, and “the politics of state-funded research generating profit for private corporations”), he made a case for professional reciprocity and announced that the journal expected any submitting author to agree to review three submissions in return, as payback for the three reports generated on their own submission. Now, with a greater proportion of submitting authors employed precariously or not at all, and the rising workloads for all scholars regardless of rank or employment status, I cannot articulate such a demand. From my vantage point managing over 550 new and revised submissions per year, peer review can no longer be expected to function as an “exchange economy.”

In the current conjuncture, it is mutual aid at best. Despite the incredible erosion of institutional and social supports, those who have the capacity to review are stepping up. They are going against the grain of the academic competitive individualism, and this, at least, is heartening.

So I write, though I have no solutions to offer, to say that I am grateful to those who help us keep S&L going and understand all too well why many who share our intellectual and political commitments are not able to pitch in. I also write because I have no solutions to offer. I am privileged, as an editor, to have a window into the development of so many ideas, and to play a role in facilitating scholarly conversations and debates. Through that window, I also see so much evidence of exhaustion and burnout and material insecurity amongst colleagues and peers. So I write to say to those who can do something about this – e.g. the aforementioned ever expanding educational administrative class – that this is the view from here, here being one of those “top-tier” journals you all want your faculty to publish in to prove their and your institutions “merit” and “excellence.” A reckoning with the facts of exploitation, rather than EDI initiatives and more memos congratulating us all on jobs well done through adversity, would be very welcome any time now.

‘Pervasive’ inequality derailing black UK chemists’ careers, report finds

Royal Society of Chemistry says black and minority ethnic chemists paid less and less likely to get research funding

Black and minority ethnic chemists face “pervasive” inequalities that restrict their access to research funding and derail their academic careers, according to a new report by the Royal Society of Chemistry.

The report found that while black students were well represented at undergraduate level, very few were able to develop academic careers, with only one black professor of chemistry of the 575 professors working in UK universities.
Material cultures

Replication and Reproduction: Crises in Psychology and Academic Labour
Felicity Callard
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Article Information

Abstract
Discussions of the replication crisis in psychology require more substantive analysis of the crisis of academic labour and of social reproduction in the university. Both the replication crisis and the crisis of social reproduction in the university describe a failure in processes of reproducing something. The financial crisis of 2007–8 shortly preceded the emergence of the replication crisis, as well as exacerbated ongoing tendencies in the organisation and practices of university research (particularly the use of precarious contracts and the adjunctification of research). These provide two reasons to address these two named crises together. But many analyses of and responses to the replication crisis turn to research culture, often at the expense of adequate investigations of research labour. Today’s psychological sciences are made through multiple forms of labour: these include researchers, who range from senior principal investigators to sub-contracted, and exploited, research assistants; research participants/subjects, who include those providing labour for experiments via exploitative platforms including Amazon Mechanical Turk, and workers providing heterogeneous technical and administrative labour. Through understanding what is at stake for these multiple forms of labour, psychology might better analyse problems besetting psychology today, as well as develop different imaginaries and practices for how to address them.

“Cause we are living in a material world
And I am a material girl” Madonna

UCU
Fair Pay: £2,500 pay uplift on all pay points
Job Security: £10 minimum, unregulated contract types
Four Fights
What we are fighting for
Manageable Workloads: 35 hours, if below the standard weekly employment contract of 30 hours
Equality: Naturally agreed action to close the gender, ethnic, and racial pay gap
www.ucu.org.uk
“...the turn to “research culture” looks good on paper, but there’s zero reason to believe it will change practice. Any incremental changes at the margins will be insignificant compared to the core issues of pay, pensions and precarity...

Since 2009, the value of pay in HE has fallen over 20%, a period in which real wage across the wider economy have been flat. The only possible message this sends is that society values research and researchers 20% less than it did a decade ago.

You don’t need a PhD to work out the impact of this on day-to-day morale, the ambivalence and hostility of government and university management to its research staff casts an ever-darkener shadow over the joys of the job. Far from world-leading, UK research culture is sliding ever further into the doldrums, and it will take much more than a new era of management jargon to fix it. “
Power and bullying in research

Eric Lander, director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy and science advisor to US President Joe Biden, resigned on Feb 7, after an internal review found that he had bullied staff members. The investigation was concluded weeks before but only came to light following reporting by Politico. This event is emblematic of research’s failure to rein in workplace bullying and of a research culture that remains in thrall to big names and bigger egos.

Prerna Mathi, head of the UK’s Medical Research Council, has apologised following allegations of bullying and an internal investigation. Alice Gast, president of Imperial College London, has also recently apologised for bullying. An Imperial investigation found that Gast “exercised her position in such a way as to undermine [staff] both personally and professionally.” The problem of power being central in two of three institutions cited in Imperial’s report offers insight into the structural issues at play in all three of these cases.

Wellcome’s 2023 report, What Researchers Think About The Culture They Work In, sets out the perspective of scientists subject to the behaviour of powerful senior staff. It found that 63% of researchers witnessed bullying or harassment, but only 20% felt comfortable speaking up. 5% of researchers felt that anonymity had been stifled by research culture, with 63% believing that their workplace puts more value on metrics and output than research quality. Institutions also seem to struggle to establish an agreed definition of bullying and harassment, and even when bullying is reported, it can be met with institutional inaction.

Cultures of honesty

The Biomedical Bubble

Why UK research and innovation needs a greater diversity of priorities, politics, places and people

Dark Academia

How Universities Die

Peter Fleming
“If I look back on many years of involvement in political decision-making and policy-making around science, innovation and R&D, I am struck by how much of it tends to turn on gut feel of the individuals involved, than on hard evidence and analysis.

This is ironic, since good science is all about testing hypotheses against data, empirical results and facts. I do believe there is a potential role for UKRI here - at modest cost - to take a deliberate strategic decision to sponsor and promote more good research, analysis and evidence-gathering on “what works” in policy on science, R&D and innovation. We should, in short, live by our values!”
Experiment, translate and transform: priorities for the next decade of research on research. RoRi Phase 2 launch event.

Date and time
Mon, 20 June 2022
15:00 – 18:00 CEST

About this event
RoRi’s mission is to improve how research is funded, practised and evaluated, so that it works better for everybody. RoRi was established in 2019 as a two-year pilot and has been able to make significant progress in turning the tools of research back on itself—generating data and analysis that can improve how we design, manage and support research.

Experiment, translate and transform: priorities for the next decade of research on research

Please join us for a special online event to kickstart RoRi’s second phase, from 15:00-18:00 CEST (14:00-17:00 BST) on 20 June 2022. The event is co-hosted with the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).

Our opening keynote speaker will be Michael Nielsen, who is a...
Cultures of formative assessment

The next REF can drive a better research culture

By Tanita Casco, Miles Padgett, Grace Gottlieb and David Price
Cultures of creative chaos

Is ‘universal basic income’ a better option than research grants?

Instead of spending time competing for competitive funding, academics should be given a lump sum, paper suggests

October 10, 2017

David Matthews

Twitter: @DavidMjourn

Every tenured academic should receive a “basic income” to fund their research projects, rather than wasting their time submitting largely unsuccessful bids for grants, two researchers say.

All researchers would be entitled to a stipend every five years of about $600,000 (£460,000) in the US and just over $500,000 in the Netherlands if research grants’ total value was shared out equally, the paper calculates, enough to hire a senior

Source: Getty

A Saturnalia of science?
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