Positive Research Cultures

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A positive research culture is one in which colleagues are recognised and valued for their varied contributions to a research activity, in which colleagues support each other to succeed, and in which there is an incentive to produce work that meets the highest standards of academic rigour.
Organisational cultures

(Organisational) Culture - a pattern of basic assumptions, norms and values, that are invented, discovered, or developed by a given group, as it learns to adapt to internal and external drivers and which are proven over time to be effective


‘At the university level, culture can be defined as the values and beliefs of university stakeholders (i.e., administrators, faculty, students, board members and support staff), based on tradition and communicated verbally and nonverbally.’

University cultures

‘The unprecedented growth, complexity and competitiveness of the global economy… creating relentless and cumulative pressures on higher education institutions to respond to the changing environment requiring far-reaching institutional adaptations involving significant transformation….’

‘…the most successful campus cultures appear to be those that support both group cooperation and individual achievement. Alternatively, those university cultures that encourage competition rather than internal cooperation tend to exhibit dysfunctional behaviour. This type of behaviour often leads to conflict between the university culture and the actions of the hierarchies, resulting in alienation, disorganization, and confusion’

‘The culture in UK research establishments is one of the reasons the country is an attractive and productive place to undertake research. If you want excellent research, you need a positive research culture that supports all individuals involved. Alongside national policies and programmes, local policies and the attitudes and behaviour of staff at all levels influences this.’

‘Enhancing research culture doesn’t require major effort and resources. Organizations across the UK and globally have made changes linked to integrity that have improved their research culture. These range from simple approaches such as using informal communication channels to nurture a supportive environment, discussing successes and “failures”, to embedding research integrity into the heart of institutional culture, requiring research leaders and senior administrators to lead by example.’

https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/09/7-ways-to-promote-better-research-culture/
We believe that a positive research culture is essential for achieving research excellence. Not only does it deliver benefits for individuals, but also for research institutions — including helping to attract and retain the world’s top talent, encouraging collaboration and boosting staff morale and productivity.

https://www.nature.com/articles/s41568-019-0127-7
The first set of annual delivery plans...is continuing to focus on reforming UK research culture in the areas of integrity and ethics, equality and diversity, bullying and harassment, and open access....

“We have publicly committed to using our position as the largest public-sector funder of research and innovation in the UK to lead positive behavioural change nationally and internationally,” the agency said in its plan.

From Compliance to Culture

- Concordat to Support Research Integrity
- Responsible use of metrics
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Bullying and Harassment
- SFC Outcome Agreement
- Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers
- Concordat on Open Research Data
- Open access; Plan S
- Open research (≠ Open access)
- REF2021 Environment Statement
- Funding assurance
What’s missing from this picture?

- Wellbeing – how do we support a positive research culture while supporting wellbeing and work life balance?
  - do the drivers conflict with each other?
  - Not just staff....

- Where are PGRs in this discussion – they are subject to the same policies and drivers
  - How do we communicate these policies and drivers to them in a helpful, productive and supportive way?
  - How do we help them to navigate the pressures of understanding the requirements of becoming a researcher while helping them into the next phase of their lives (finding a job)?
How do we bring this together?

...and avoid damaging conflicts?

The Hong Kong Manifesto for Assessing Researchers: Fostering Research Integrity, June 2019
Some examples and ideas

...by no means all the answers!
How do we understand the issues / barriers and then track progress?

- Research culture and careers group
- PGR Townhall meetings
- PGR blog and distance yammer group
- Research (wellbeing; communities; physical activity)
- PRES (added EDI & data management qs)
- Research Culture survey
- Annual reporting on web (open)
Supporting what we value

Credit where credit’s due

• Specialist career tracks
• Recording authorship contribution
• Revised promotions criteria to include collegiality (in all areas)

Openness as a route to quality

• Sharing research as widely as possible, as early as possible.
• Publications, data, code, materials, educational resources
Celebrating what we value: Research Culture Awards 2019

- Good research thrives in an environment in which colleagues support each other to succeed

- Recognise individuals or teams who improve research culture by taking steps to further the career of colleagues, particularly those at earlier career stages
Putting the pieces together...

Policy drivers
Athena Swan, transferable skills training, research integrity (open sharing / peer review)

PRES question...
My department provides a good seminar programme

University
Guidance / sharing good practice; accessible venues; credits or funding for student-led initiatives

Department
When do they take place?
Can PGRs Skype in?
Are they run in an inclusive fashion?
Student involvement

Student
Attend, organise, suggest speakers, topics, formats, ask questions, support and encourage new students to get involved

Supervisor
Attend, organise, secure speakers, promote to new students, encourage questions and participation from students, provide support / training and feedback

...for departmental seminar series
GTA / teaching
Work life balance
Promoting good use of social space
Student society
Student representation / advocacy
Open and reproducible research
Good publication practice
Virtual communities
Peer support groups
Conferences

Capture:
✓ Policy drivers
✓ Roles and responsibilities
✓ Examples of good practice to share
Thank you!