RESEARCH CULTURE AT NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY
THE ROAD AHEAD

A collective vision for positive Research Culture at Newcastle University, and a roadmap for 2021-2022, and beyond

INTRODUCTION

People are at the heart of the University's Research Strategy.

We want to take this opportunity to emphasise to all our students, researchers, academics, technicians and professional services colleagues, how personally committed we are to building a welcoming and empowering Research Culture where everyone has the freedom and opportunity to succeed, and in which we can work together to respond to challenges. We want our Research Culture to recognise everyone's valuable and varied contributions to research, to nurture people's talents and support diverse career aspirations, to fuel people's passions and creativity and be genuinely fun to immerse in, and to inspire future generations not only by the research we do, but how we do it.

In this document, we set out a community-led institutional vision for our Research Culture, based on what students and colleagues tell us is important and what matters to them. We also outline the steps we will be taking over the next year, and beyond, to realise our shared aspirations, and how our richly diverse research community can help shape and co-create our collective actions.

We know a positive Research Culture matters: it improves the quality and reach of research, helps attract and keep talented people, and underpins an enjoyable and rewarding experience for colleagues and students alike.
We recognise that recent, high profile reports have revealed stark issues in UK Research Culture, some of which have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. These resonate with conversations we have had with students and colleagues in our own research communities, as well as some of our personal career experiences. Our response is to start work in areas where we would like to do better, seek to better understand some deep issues to tackle them more effectively, and collaborate across the sector to ensure we achieve lasting and meaningful improvements in Research Culture. With the recent publication of the government's R&D People and Culture Strategy, now is the time to take action, and we want to be at the forefront for driving change.

Research Culture involves everyone in our research community, by which we include anyone who contributes to our research endeavours and helps deliver a research-rich educational experience to our students. We have already consulted with a diverse cross-section of our research community to help define what a positive Research Culture should look and feel like based on what we value here at Newcastle University. We would like to thank everyone who was involved with this important piece of work. Inclusion, consultation and co-creation will remain at the heart of what we do.

Culture change takes time: we won't be able to do everything at once, and it's unlikely we'll get everything right straight away. It's also important that our work aligns well to wider University initiatives around culture and values, and further develops synergies between education and research. We welcome any thoughts you have that can help improve our plans, and you can find out how to do that on our Research Culture website. We will be setting up working groups, running a University-wide survey, and supporting consultation events through the Skills Academy; we hope you will get involved. To achieve our ambitious research goals, we need to change some of the things we do, and for that we will need everyone's insights, ideas and solutions. We strongly believe that Research Culture change belongs to all of us, and want to hear and benefit from diverse voices. We very much look forward to working with you, and building the Research Culture that we want and can feel proud of.

Candy Rowe Dean for Research Culture and Strategy
Brian Walker Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research Strategy and Resources
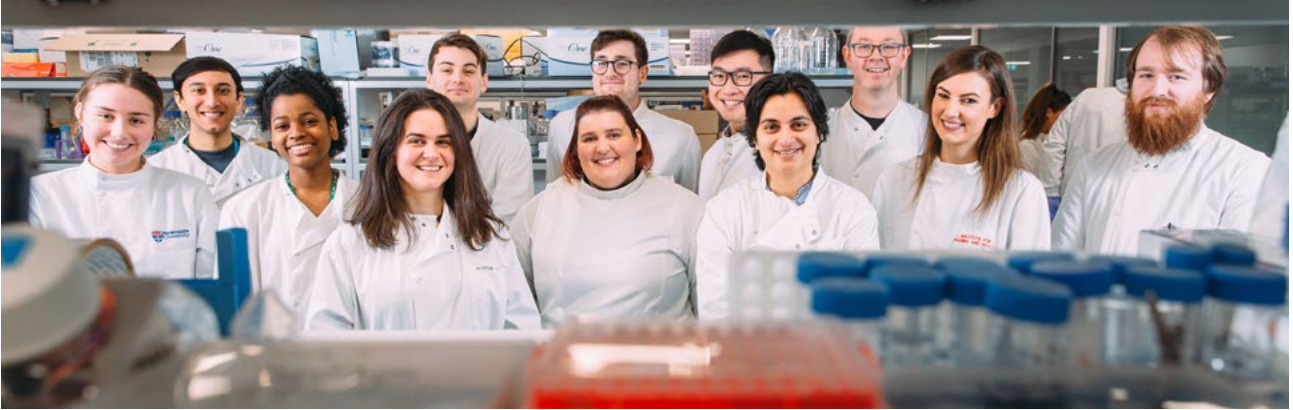
WHY DOES A POSITIVE RESEARCH CULTURE MATTER?

There are many answers to this all-important question. Crucially, a positive Research Culture matters for people and research. It also matters for the institution, and underpins the success of the University's ambitious **Research Strategy**. This question has recently been posed to postgraduate research students and colleagues from across different job groups, career stages and disciplines, as well as different parts of the University, including its international campuses in Singapore and Malaysia. The depth and breadth of answers reveal diverse insights and perspectives that convey the value to the wider University community.

FOR PEOPLE AND RESEARCH

- Gives freedom to follow and play with ideas – unleashes creativity
- Improves the quality and reach of our research – makes it more robust and credible
- Promotes research integrity
- Diverse perspectives bring fresh thinking
- Cross-disciplinary working becomes more accessible
- People benefit from the expertise of more experienced colleagues
- Improved skills and confidence increases efficiency and support for others
- Supports risk-taking and intelligent failure
- Allows personal growth and development
- Nurtures early career researchers and postgraduate research students
- Can help build sustainable pathways for all colleagues on fixed-term contracts
- Increases personal performance
- Makes people feel proud and valued
- Gives confidence
- Builds trust and better working relationships
- Creates healthy and psychologically safe environments to allow people to flourish
- People feel included and not left behind
- Offers a better work-life balance
- Improves wellbeing at work (research is fun!)
- Supports a 'research-rich' education for our students
- Improves career porosity by providing the ability to move between job families

FOR THE INSTITUTION

- Builds institutional reputation
- Happy and engaged employees are more self-motivated and productive
- Promotes parity of esteem across job groups and career stages
- Embeds Equality, Diversity and Inclusion into research practices to reduce disadvantage and enable people and their ideas
- Increases engagement – people feel part of something important
- Psychologically safe environments means ideas and solutions are shared, avoids group-think and opens up new directions
- Diversity and inclusion enhances institutional resilience and openness to new ideas
- Builds trust amongst colleagues and students
- Increases public trust in research
- Positively viewed by funders
- Increases research collaboration and income
- Maximises the benefits of a 'mixed economy' where people make different contributions
- Exciting ideas often have long-term impact and increase innovation
- Attracts and keeps 'talent' and makes the most of it
- Creates more impact beyond the University – our people are our ambassadors
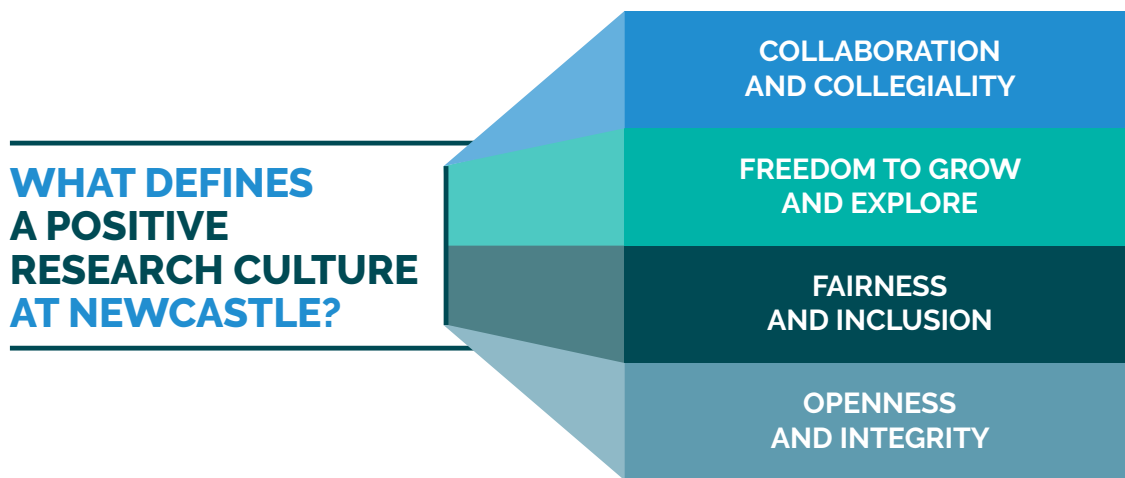- Reduces reliance on a small number of 'stars'
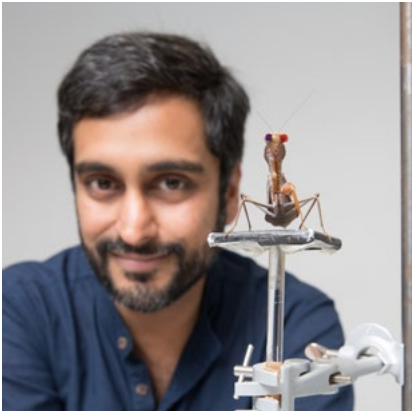
A SHARED VISION FOR A POSITIVE RESEARCH CULTURE

Although it's clear that a positive Research Culture matters, there is no single accepted way to define it, and understanding Research Culture is influenced by different personal and disciplinary contexts. However, as a University, we need a shared understanding of what a positive Research Culture looks and feels like. We need to know what it is we seek to build, and to be sure that everyone will benefit from it.

Our approach starts with what we value. Through inclusive workshops with input from a diverse cross-section of our research community; different disciplines, career stages, backgrounds and job families, we have identified four key attributes that people value and that define a positive Research Culture, in which they feel they can be at their best.

WHAT DEFINES A POSITIVE RESEARCH CULTURE AT NEWCASTLE?

- COLLABORATION AND COLLEGIALITY
- FREEDOM TO GROW AND EXPLORE
- FAIRNESS AND INCLUSION
- OPENNESS AND INTEGRITY

These four attributes strongly align to, and build on, our **University Values and Guiding Principles** that promote a supportive and inclusive institutional culture. They allow us to see more clearly what we are aim to achieve, and consequently, provide a framework for thinking about where we can improve.

Whatever discipline, whatever role, whether thinking institutionally or at a more local level, this values-led definition can guide the work we all do to build a more positive Research Culture, and to maximise the benefits that it brings.

The Research Strategy team are working with colleagues across the University and collaborating with the **INORMS Research Evaluation Group** to develop institutional Research Culture Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) based on these four attributes for a positive Research Culture. These KPIs will allow us to track improvement and measure success as an institution, and be fully embedded in the formal reporting mechanisms for the University Research Strategy.
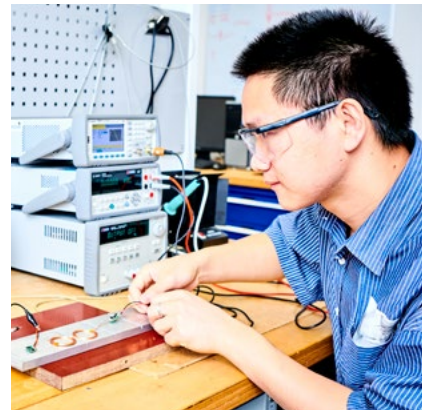
HOW OUR RESEARCH COMMUNITY DEFINES
A POSITIVE RESEARCH CULTURE

COLLABORATION AND COLLEGIALITY

Building welcoming and vibrant research communities that foster connectivity and collaboration, and where people can bring and share our ideas, knowledge and skills. Actively supporting one another's research activities, and providing quality mentoring and career support to all. Promoting understanding and team working across different job families, career stages, disciplines, organisational structures and sectors to better recognise, value and harness diverse contributions to research.

FREEDOM TO GROW AND EXPLORE

Enjoying the freedom of being curious and creative, being ambitious and taking risks, and stretching horizons. Having opportunities for inspiring encounters that can spark fresh ideas, and introduce new ways of thinking and working that help grow our research. Acquiring personal and professional skills and knowledge that empower everyone to tackle new research questions, and support career development across disciplinary, geographical and sector boundaries.

FAIRNESS AND INCLUSION

Building psychologically safe environments where diverse skillsets, perspectives and ideas are welcomed, respected and valued and help advance research. Tackling and preventing bullying and harassment, discrimination and bias in all its forms, and promoting wellbeing across the diverse research community. Ensuring internal research processes, practices and structures give people equal opportunity to succeed, and make everyone feel like they belong.

OPENNESS AND INTEGRITY

Promoting and adopting open research principles and practices that increase transparency and rigour, and accelerate the reach of our research. Ensuring research adheres to the highest standards for ethics and integrity. Having open and honest dialogue about research strategy and culture, and how research contributions are evaluated to build trust across the research community.

BUILDING A POSITIVE RESEARCH CULTURE TOGETHER

Research Culture change involves everyone, and as a University, we are fortunate to be able to build on the excellent work already underway through the efforts of many individuals, teams and projects, not all of which can be mentioned here.

Promoting collaboration and supporting careers is central to our **Research Strategy**. As a signatory to the revised Researcher Concordat, the University is fully committed to improving access to a wide range of research skills and career development opportunities through the Skills Academy. These opportunities will be made available for our entire research community and support research in the region and abroad. Other teams have been developing new activities and initiatives, including improving interdisciplinary networking through the **Newcastle University Centres of Research Excellence** (NUCoREs), fostering a wide range of external collaborations and partnerships through the **NU Academies** and Regional Interest Groups, and supporting early career researchers through the **Newcastle University Academic Track** (NUAcT) fellowship scheme.

The University has a longstanding commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI): building an inclusive culture is already embedded into our existing **Athena Swan**, **Race Equality Charter**, **Researcher Concordat**, and **Technician's Commitment** action plans. The University supports active EDI networks for colleagues and postgraduate students, and community-led activities are supported and recognised through an EDI Fund and annual awards. This year also sees the launch of a new 'Leading Through Values' Programme to help leaders foster more psychologically safe and inclusive working environments and 'Be an Active Bystander' training to enable people to speak out if they witness inappropriate behaviour. These new initiatives are important, visible elements of our wider plans for culture change.

Ongoing projects run by People Services and Organisational Development speak directly to supporting our Research Culture. The Academic Promotions Review proposes that contribution to citizenship is fully embedded in promotions process, Engage and Aspire is developing more effective annual appraisals for all colleagues, and work around casualisation has already led to greater use of longer and open-ended contracts.

The University is a signatory to a number of concordats and declarations promoting openness and integrity in research, and was one of the first members of the UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN). As a signatory of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, the University has approved a **Responsible Metrics Statement**, and is working to embed these principles into our evaluation processes.

These institutional activities offer important opportunities to facilitate improvements to Research Culture, and to ensure that work links to the wider context, including education and organisational culture. Beyond these institutional activities, faculty and unit level actions support improvements to Research Culture, with a wide range of activities having already been embedded in Faculty Strategic Plans. Whilst impossible to capture all the activities supporting the development of a positive Research Culture in this short document, further examples can be found **here**.

NEXT STEPS

Our new institutional Research Culture Coordination Group (RCCG) will work with the research community to build our institutional Research Culture. The group spans our research community, and brings together teams that already deliver and support Research Culture change. It already has representatives from People Services, the Research Strategy and Development Team, the Research Funding Team, Library Services, Organisational Development, Faculties, the Doctoral College, the Technicians Commitment, the Concordat for Researchers, EDI and Wellbeing.

Over the next year, the group will develop and deliver an institutional Research Culture Action Plan. This will involve drawing on what can be learned from conversations and consultation events around a range of important topics, and a University-wide survey to better understand what and where we need to improve. The team will collaborate on those shared and often very challenging and wicked problems that sit deep in our culture, and lead change at an institutional level. The group has already identified some initial workstreams and projects to kick start the work in areas we would like to improve, and to ensure we are seeing changes in this academic year (see below). These have arisen either from priorities within the Research Strategy or been highlighted through internal and external consultations, and from which future work can build.

RCCG WORKSTREAMS STARTING IN 2021/22

Releasing quality time for research

One of the priority actions of the **Research Strategy** is to release more quality time to nurture creativity, solve problems, enable professional development and build lasting collaborations, both inside and outside the University. This would benefit all that we do in Education and Research. Scope includes: Community consultation to better understand the opportunities and challenges in the Newcastle University context; Considering how time is spent; Promoting quality research over quantity; Promoting personal development time for Early Career Researchers; Reducing bureaucracy, transactions and approval steps; Changing ways of working to be more agile and less reliant on meeting time; Sharing good practice around what works.

COLLABORATION AND COLLEGIALITY	FREEDOM TO GROW AND EXPLORE

Rewarding what we value

Review and develop criteria and career pathways that fully recognise and reward people's diverse contributions to research excellence across our community. Scope includes: Supporting the expansion of Academic Promotions to include citizenship as a criterion; Consulting widely about how research excellence should be defined and evaluated with the aim of revising and diversifying reward and recognition processes; Developing a broader range of career pathways; Embedding the use of responsible metrics in processes where research is evaluated, and provide appropriate training; Developing responsible KPIs for Research Culture around what we value in a positive Research Culture; Considering Research Culture Awards.

COLLABORATION AND COLLEGIALITY	FREEDOM TO GROW AND EXPLORE	FAIRNESS AND INCLUSION	OPENNESS AND INTEGRITY

Improving training and career support

Build research skills to support personal and professional career development for all, increasing confidence and agility in the modern research environment. Scope includes: Developing of the Skills Academy for all colleagues and postgraduate research students as a 'one-stop-shop' portal with community-led spaces for sharing knowledge, techniques and good practice; Reviewing University training offer; Addressing training gaps in research ethics and integrity, support for mid-career researchers, leadership and management, interdisciplinary working; Considering new career pathways; Seeking to engage early with external partners to deliver high quality career development opportunities and share best practice.

FREEDOM TO GROW AND EXPLORE	OPENNESS AND INTEGRITY	COLLABORATION AND COLLEGIALITY

Building inclusive and safe research environments

Offer everyone in the research community the freedom and opportunity to succeed. Scope includes: Tackling bullying and harassment in research, ensuring processes are robust and and preventative actions are being taken; Harmonising and consolidating support for Early Career Researchers; Improve representation, e.g. on research committees; Addressing any inequalities in funding application and success rates, working in partnership with funders as appropriate; Developing new initiatives to promote inclusion and psychological safety in the research environment; Increasing parity across roles and reducing hierarchy; Reviewing and enhancing mental wellbeing training for PGR supervisors; Improving EDI awareness for managers.

FAIRNESS AND INCLUSION	COLLABORATION AND COLLEGIALITY	FREEDOM TO GROW AND EXPLORE

Embedding open research practices into 'business as usual'

Move towards a culture of more open research to increase transparency and rigour, and the reach of our research. Scope includes: Developing and publishing an institutional statement for open research; Creation of a community of practice that includes postgraduates, academics and Professional Services colleagues; Identification of a network of open research champions across the University; More consistent use of ORCID; Increase awareness around the benefits of open research; Partner with UK Reproducibility Network to drive uptake of open research practices across the sector.

OPENNESS AND INTEGRITY

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

The RCCG welcomes feedback on the planned workstreams and their scope: this document aims to be just the start of an open and fruitful dialogue about building Research Culture. See our **Research Culture website** for more information, including a Toolkit to help structure conversations about Research Culture: What areas would you like to the RCCG to prioritise and what would you most like to change?

You can leave any thoughts or ideas you have **here**, on our Feedback page. All comments will be shared with the RCCG and relevant workstreams.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Daniel Parry, Open Lab, Newcastle University
https://openlab.ncl.ac.uk/people/daniel-parry/#bio

Thomas Jackson, TyneSight photography
https://www.tynesight.co.uk/

John Donoghue
http://www.jdphotographer.co.uk/

Big T Images
http://bigtimages.co.uk/

NU RESEARCH CULTURE ROADMAP 2021/22

2021

First meeting of the Research Culture Coordination Group (RCCG)
Workstream mapping

Development of RCCG Workstreams
Initial working groups established and actions prioritised (including 6-month goals)

Sep

Oct

Nov

Dec

Skills Academy: Research Culture Programme starts

Launch of the Research Culture Roadmap

Embed KPIs for Research Culture into Research Strategy

2022

Apr

Mar

Feb

Jan

Survey Report and Develop Actions
Discuss survey findings across the institution and work with the research community to co-create actions in areas where we can improve

Research Culture Survey Open
University-wide survey for our research community to better understand our current research culture

May

Jun

Jul

Institutional Research Culture Action Plan Reviewed and Approved
Consolidating and prioritising our activities at an institutional level Research Culture Action Plan

Report RCCG Achievements and Celebrate Successes