

Research Culture Enablers Network

Report 2024



Word cloud responses to: "What is the most enjoyable aspect of your role?" (n=38)

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Foreword

At the heart of the Research Culture Enablers Network (warwick.ac.uk/RCEN) is a commitment to elevate the conversation on research culture and to co-create practical solutions to shared challenges. RCEN was launched in December 2023 to address disparities and foster collaboration among colleagues dedicated to advancing research culture. Through the exchange of ideas and the questioning of current practices, we aim to identify gaps, generate new insights, and drive impactful change across the sector.

With the first year anniversary of the network approaching, this report draws on insights from our expanding membership, gathered through 244 responses to our registration form—where new members provide an overview of their involvement in research culture and highlight their key priorities—as well as 38 in-depth responses to our 'Models of Research Culture Support' survey.

Initial analysis shows that much of the research culture work at UK institutions centres on amplifying research community voices and addressing their priorities, alongside leading or managing institutional change initiatives. While many of these roles are located within central research offices, they also span doctoral colleges, libraries, and other areas. At UK Higher Education Institutions, research culture enabling colleagues are likely to be key in developing baselines for tracking shifts in people, culture, and environment as we approach key milestones like the REF.

The breadth of roles represented in RCEN includes, but is not limited to: **Research culture managers/officers and heads of research culture**, who drive and embed research culture initiatives at an institutional level; **Academic leads for research culture**, who oversee broader research culture strategy; **EDI specialists**, focused on fostering a research environment that supports belonging and psychological safety for all; **Research integrity, ethics, excellence, and open research experts**, who safeguard responsible, transparent practices; **Researcher developers**, who support skills development, primarily for research staff and postgraduate researchers; and **Public engagement, outreach, and knowledge exchange professionals**, who bridge connections between researchers and external stakeholders. Our members operate in a variety of institutional settings, including universities, research institutes, NHS organisations, and museums.

Analysis of survey responses highlights a strong demand for training in **EDI in research, change management, and programme management**. Members also expressed strong support for continued, structured opportunities to **share best practices** and **collaborate** on sector-wide culture change initiatives.

The insights gathered through this report will guide the planning of future activities by the RCEN Committee and will help refine our network's strategy. However, this survey is just one form of consultation; we remain eager to hear your thoughts on what we should prioritise next as we continue building a collaborative, solutions-driven community for advancing research culture.

- Research Culture Enablers Network Committee

Research Culture Priorities Identified by our Members

The Research Culture Enablers Network (RCEN) aims to elevate the conversation on research culture by fostering a shared understanding of the priorities that are central to shaping a more positive environment.

Our journey began with an initial consultation phase, during which we engaged informal conversations with research culture managers through Teams, supplemented by interactive sessions with the first network members via Padlet. These early discussions provided valuable insights and helped us identify a broad set of priorities ([Research Culture Enablers Network \(padlet.com\)](https://padlet.com)). Since then, we've gathered insights from additional colleagues. Each new member who joins RCEN is asked to share their priorities, enriching our conversation and ensuring that our work reflects the evolving landscape of research culture.

RCEN Top 10 Research Culture Priorities (identified by initial consultation):

1. **Research Leadership:** Prioritising researcher development and enhancing leadership training to support responsible supervision and mentoring of PGRs and ECRs.
2. **Psychological Safety in Research:** Addressing mental health issues specific to research, creating safe spaces for open dialogue, and tackling the impact of precarious contracts.
3. **Responsible Research Culture Metrics:** Promoting accurate, holistic assessments of research culture, going beyond traditional frameworks like REF.
4. **Inclusive Research Environments:** Standardising inclusive recruitment and promotion practices, embedding EDI throughout research environments, and supporting disabled researchers and minoritised groups.
5. **Embedding Institutional Research Culture Change:** Achieving real cultural shifts through coordinated efforts, incentives, and institutional memory-building.
6. **Research Career Diversity and Mobility:** Enhancing talent development and facilitating cross-sector research knowledge exchange, while improving career prospects for researchers outside academia.
7. **Recognition of Diverse Contributions to Research:** Valuing the time and contributions of all team members, including those in non-academic roles, and recognising discipline-specific research cultures.
8. **Open and Transparent Research:** Promoting research integrity and fostering a culture of trust and communication, with recognition for open research practices.
9. **Research Enabler Empowerment:** Ensuring parity of esteem for research enabling roles and supporting upskilling and career progression for roles like Technicians and Research Managers.
10. **Collaborative Research Culture:** Facilitating interdisciplinary, representative, and equitable research practices, and fostering effective team-based research models.

Some unique or expanded priorities provided by members when they signed up include:

- **Institutional Accountability:** Clear mechanisms to address research culture issues, such as regular audits and public reports on EDI goals.
- **Intersectional Research Culture:** Addressing the complexities of how different aspects of identity (e.g., race, gender, disability) interact with other research culture challenges.
- **Inclusive Research Funding Practices:** Evaluating and revising policies and practices to ensure they do not disproportionately disadvantage minority-led research teams or interdisciplinary approaches.
- **Flexible Career Pathways for Research Professionals:** Offering a range of options for progression within research enabling roles to retain talent within the research ecosystem.
- **Sustainable Research Practices:** Reducing the environmental impact of research activities.

Research culture is a broad and evolving field, and RCEN will continue to curate knowledge, foster collaboration, and ensure our discussions remain responsive to emerging trends.

We meet online every two months for sector updates, presentations, and networking opportunities, working in focused groups to address specific research culture challenges. These activities allow us to develop thought leadership and drive improvements in practice.

Past topics have included research integrity, collective leadership in research, challenges unique to interdisciplinary research, and updates on PCE assessment in the REF. As our format evolves, we plan to incorporate more peer training and mentoring, with aspirations to support teams in coming together to conduct research on research culture.

Access past recordings and join the network: warwick.ac.uk/RCEN

Survey Results

The 'Models of Research Culture Support' survey (warwick.ac.uk/RCEN/modelsofresearchculturesupport/) was designed by the RCEN Committee with the intention of finding out more about what research culture (RC) work is and who performs it.

We received a total of 38 responses from members. The results are biased towards the Russell Group, with 63% of respondents from a Russell Group institution. Institutions also represented the 1994 Group (2), CRUK core funded (1), N8 (1), Cathedrals (1), University Alliance (1) and Guild HE (1). However, we do recognise that some of these categories are out of date and the groupings do not reflect current sector norms.

This section of the report answers the following questions:

- What is RC work and where is it conducted?
- What is the role of a RC professional?
- How can we develop as RC professionals?

What is RC work and where is it conducted?

Activities in institutions: Engaging our research communities to understand their priorities

In answer to the question, 'Which of the following types of research culture activities or initiatives take place at your institution?' over half of the institutions who responded have:

- Research culture committee/forums with an oversight of RC strategy (63%)
- Working groups to consider individual RC priorities (60%)
- Presentations to engage the research community (55%)
- Interactive workshops to engage the research community with research culture (50%)

Other popular activities included funding for RC projects allocated to Departments/Faculties/Senior stakeholders (17), positive action for postdoctoral researchers (16), peer led forums and support groups (15), positive action for postgraduate research (14), funding for RC projects open to the internal community (14), positive action for mid/senior researchers (13) and themed weeks or programmes of activity (10).

A minority of respondents reported that they had culture champions (7), RC conferences (6), positive action for undergraduate researchers (5), institution-wide mentoring programmes on RC (3), RC professional networks (2) and open funding calls for the wider research community (2).



Answers to this question are necessarily biased towards the areas respondents are most aware of and will not reflect the full work across the network. However, they do give us a view of current priorities from the individuals best placed to know.

Additional activities conducted included:

- Engagement through consultation, including existing networks representing different elements of the community e.g. Postdocs and Fellows
- Festivals of research with RC elements
- Externally funded RC projects like Wellcome Trust
- Concordat groups
- Action plans
- Inclusion of RC in institution-wide strategies

As the area of RC becomes more established this data could be revisited. It may be possible to identify different approaches to RC by adding a question on what priority the selected items take within the institution. Classification tools could then be used to identify institutional styles. For example, a 'top-down approach' could be shown by a preference for centrally conducted training, strong leadership and a lack of emphasis on peer forums or funding.

Where research culture sits

Respondents answered, 'Where does the research culture enabling individual or team sit?'. Answers to this question and, 'If other, please specify', were combined due to a high degree of crossover in 'other...'



Note that people commonly gave several answers to this question, showing the broad range of areas that RC touches on within institutions. The most frequent response was central research office (21). However, the functions across institutions are not all the same and this can make direct comparisons across institutions misleading. For example, there may be significant crossover between researcher development (10), research strategy (8), research development (3), plus functions in teams such as Research and Innovation (2).

A minority of RC was conducted at Doctoral college (or equivalent) level (4). However this could reflect a difference in membership of the RCEN network rather than a lack of RC activity. Anecdotally, RC activity at the local level can include many part-roles, potentially making it difficult for individuals in these roles to find the time to attend.

Longer term, patterns between size of institution and how diffuse or centralised the RC function is may be interesting to explore.

Who is doing research culture

In answer to 'Who at your institution has >50% of their time allocated to research culture', most respondents stated RC managers and Heads of RC, which is unsurprising given the nature of the network. At least one RC Culture Manager existed in 20 institutions, with 5 having more than one. A Head of Research Culture existed in 11. At least one RC Officer existed in 13 institutions, with 5 of those having more than one RC Officer. Culture champions were less frequent at only 4.



Surprising perhaps that there are only 7 academic leads or Deans for RC. Surprising too that so many people didn't know about the RC roles at their institutions (6) and 11 people indicated 'Other'. Other included a spread of culture work across the institution (with the FTE allocation remaining unknown) and included:

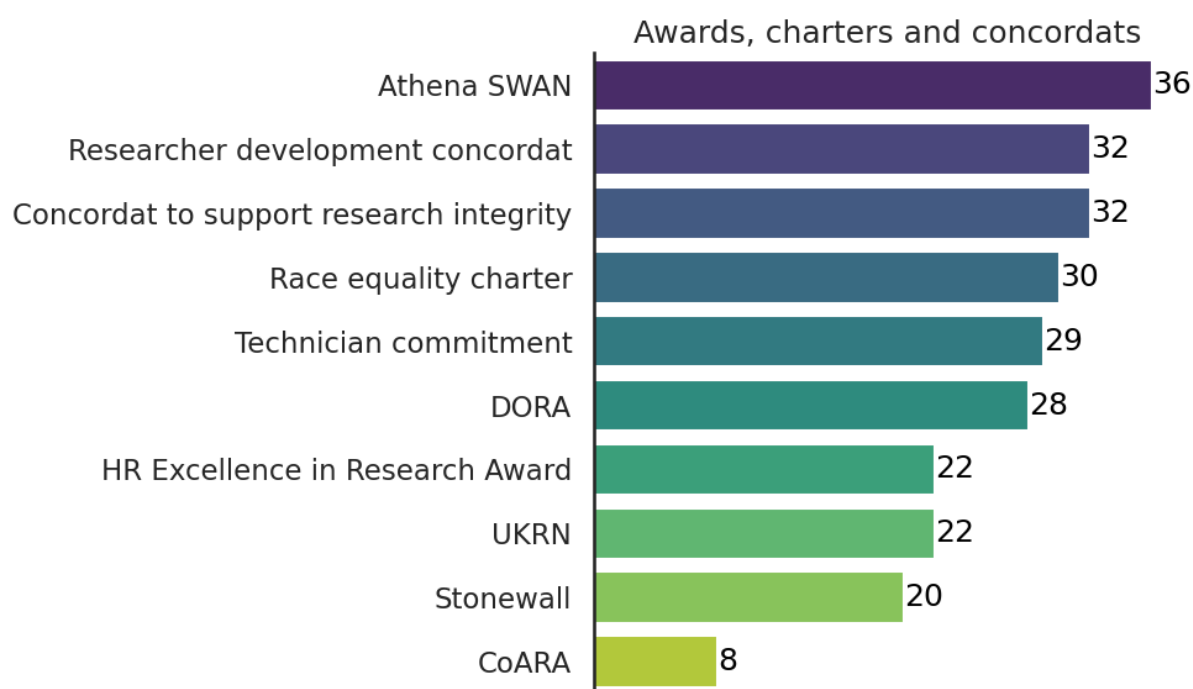
- Library colleagues
- Researcher Development Consultants
- Research Offices, including colleagues working in excellence, research and researcher development and Ethics and Integrity
- Data analysts
- Project Managers

This suggests that, whilst there is some professionalising of RC roles, outside of the core RC Manager/Head of RC and RC Officer roles, institutions may be unclear about who 'owns' RC. Research Culture professionals themselves are not always confident about where RC is happening, even when their remit is across the full institution. We can expect this to develop over the coming years.

Charters, awards and commitments involved in RC work

Athena Swan is the most subscribed award at 36/38 respondents stating that their organisation was engaged in the award. The Researcher Development Concordat and Concordat to Support Research Integrity both had 32/38 signatories. Race Equality Charter, Technicians Commitment and DORA had fewer at 30, 29 and 28 respectively.

Only 22/38 institutions were involved in the HR Excellence in Research Award and the UK Reproducibility Network. LGBTQ+ charity Stonewall had 20 signatories. CoARA, the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment, had only 8 signatories, which is perhaps less surprising given that it is relatively new.



Members additionally raised:

- Concordat on Open Research Data
- Concordat on Openness on Animal Research
- Concordat on Engaging the Public with Research
- UKRI Statement of Expectations for Doctoral Training
- NCCPE Manifesto for Public Engagement

There is not adequate data at this time to compare the rate of signing between different types of institutions but this could be explored in future. This may be especially relevant considering the potential use of concordats and awards to indicate the People, Culture and Environment part of the Research Excellence Framework at the time of writing.

What is the work of a RC professional?

Role titles

Twenty-one of the 38 respondents had job titles related to research culture, including Head of RC, RC Managers, RC Officers and RC Facilitators. Some roles included additional elements such as Research Development and RC, RC and Impact and Research Environment and RC.

Other role titles included Researcher Development (including Consultants, Seniors and Managers), Doctoral Training Managers and Heads and Research Support roles such as Support and Policy Officers. Some respondents had specific remits included in their titles, for example research excellence, strategic projects, network development, and research integrity.

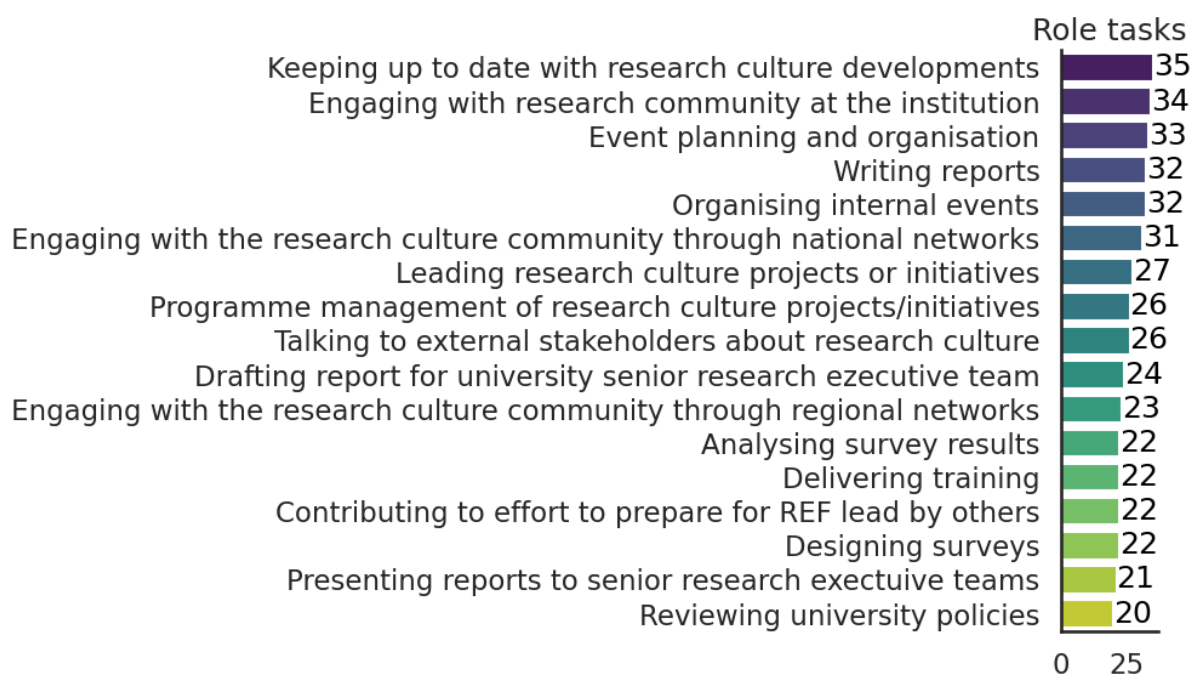
Scope of the role

Respondents were asked if they actively worked on a set of relevant challenges. There was general agreement that people did answer to these challenges, shown below:

- Improving access to and participation in research, including postgraduate research, for people from currently underrepresented groups;
- Furthering open research practices;
- Improving research conduct and reproducibility;
- Tackling bullying and harassment;
- Improving research leadership skills across all career stages;
- Creating routes for collaboration and exchange with businesses, third sector organisations and government;
- Securing and supporting the careers of researchers and associated professions;
- Diversifying recruitment, reward and recognition approaches at all career stages;
- Community-led research.

with over half the respondents (20) indicating that they answered more than 4 of the challenges. Five people felt that they answered 2-3 of the challenges, and 9 indicated that they answered 1-2 of the challenges.

Considering some of the specific tasks respondents complete in their work, the most common tasks were keeping up to date with RC developments (35), engaging with the RC community (34), event planning (33), writing reports (32), organising internal events (32), and engaging through national networks (31). Also important were leading projects or initiatives (27), programme management (26), liaising with external stakeholders (26), drafting reports for an executive team (24), engaging with regional networks (23). Equally common to one another at 22/28 were analysing survey results, delivering training, contributing to REF, designing surveys and presenting reports to executive teams. Finally, reviewing university policies was relevant to 20/38 respondents.



Full time and part time

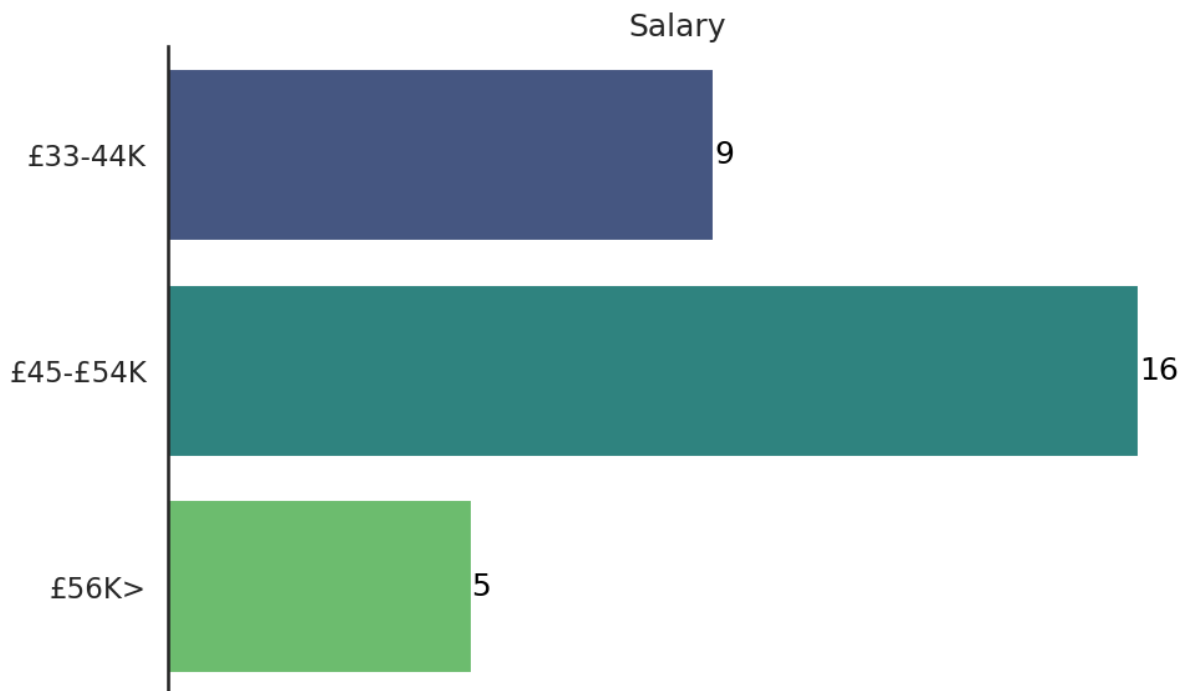
Most respondents were full-time at 78.8%. For part-time respondents 15% were contracted at 0.8 FTE. Only two respondents worked less than 0.8FTE.

This may reflect the challenge of finding the time to engage in networks within a part-time role.

Salary

Of the respondents, 79% (30/38 people) were comfortable informing the network about their pay. The majority of those (16 people, 53%) reported pay in the region of £45-54K per annum. Nine respondents had a salary of £33-44K per annum, and 5 respondents had a salary of upwards of £56K per annum.

The minimal data available indicates that the average Research Culture Manager surveyed earns in the £45-54K bracket, with the 'Head of' role potentially securing upwards of £56K. However, this is biased towards Russell Group institutions and does not provide a full picture of what these roles include.



With additional data points, and as the area of Research Culture further professionalises, future analysis might explore whether there is alignment across titles, associated tasks and recompense.

How can we develop as RC Professionals?

Training

Since starting in post many RC professionals have undertaken training and development sessions. The table below indicates types of training, whether any respondents had undertaken it, and whether any respondents were interested in taking it.

Training topic	Undertaken	Wanted
Project management	Y	Y
Leadership programmes	Y	Y
Coaching and mentoring	Y	
Change management	Y	Y
Research Ethics & Integrity	Y	
Equality Diversity and Inclusion training	Y	Y
Precarity and overwork	Y	
Behavioural change	Y	
Providing research support	Y	
REF	Y	Y
Peer review bias	Y	
Open research	Y	
Menopause in the workplace	Y	
Anti-racism	Y	
Sustainability in research	Y	
Facilitation		Y
Relationship management		Y
ECR experiences		Y

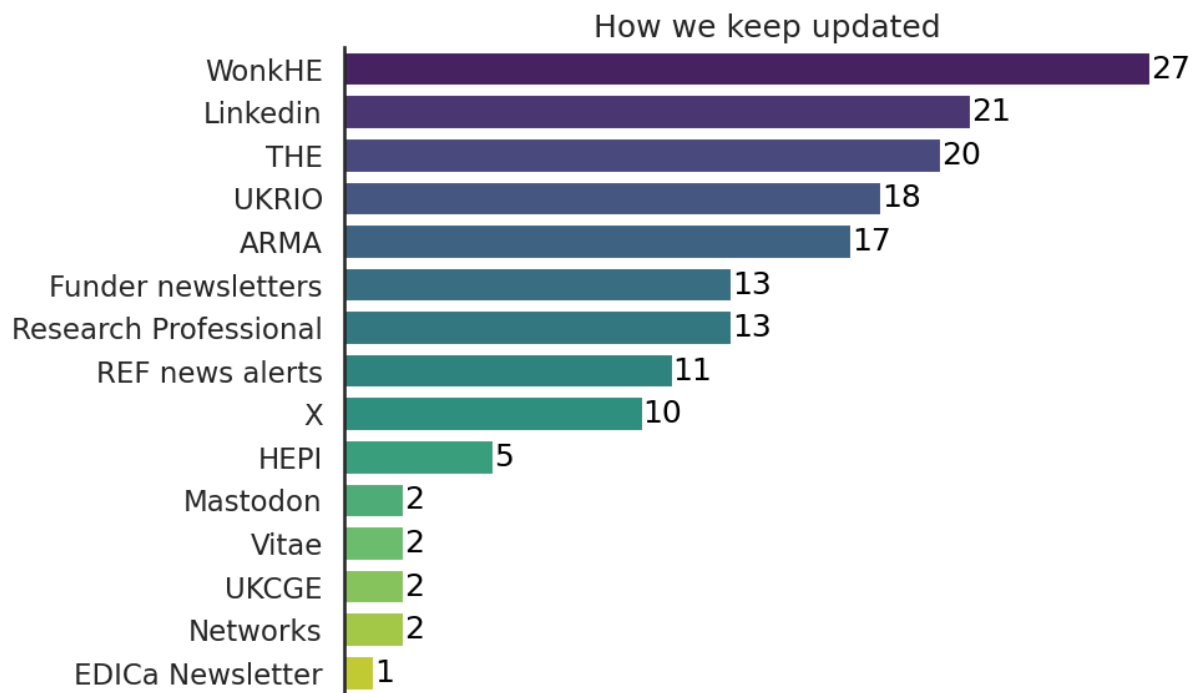
Of the suggested training ideas the most popular were change management (27), EDI in research (22) and programme management (17). We intend to use this information to guide some of our activities within the network, and to encourage members to share appropriate opportunities with other members.

Respondents noted the training options available through UKRIO, ARMA and the Vitae Getting to Grips course. Some members had or were studying for the AUA PG Cert in Leadership and Management in HE, and Senior Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy.

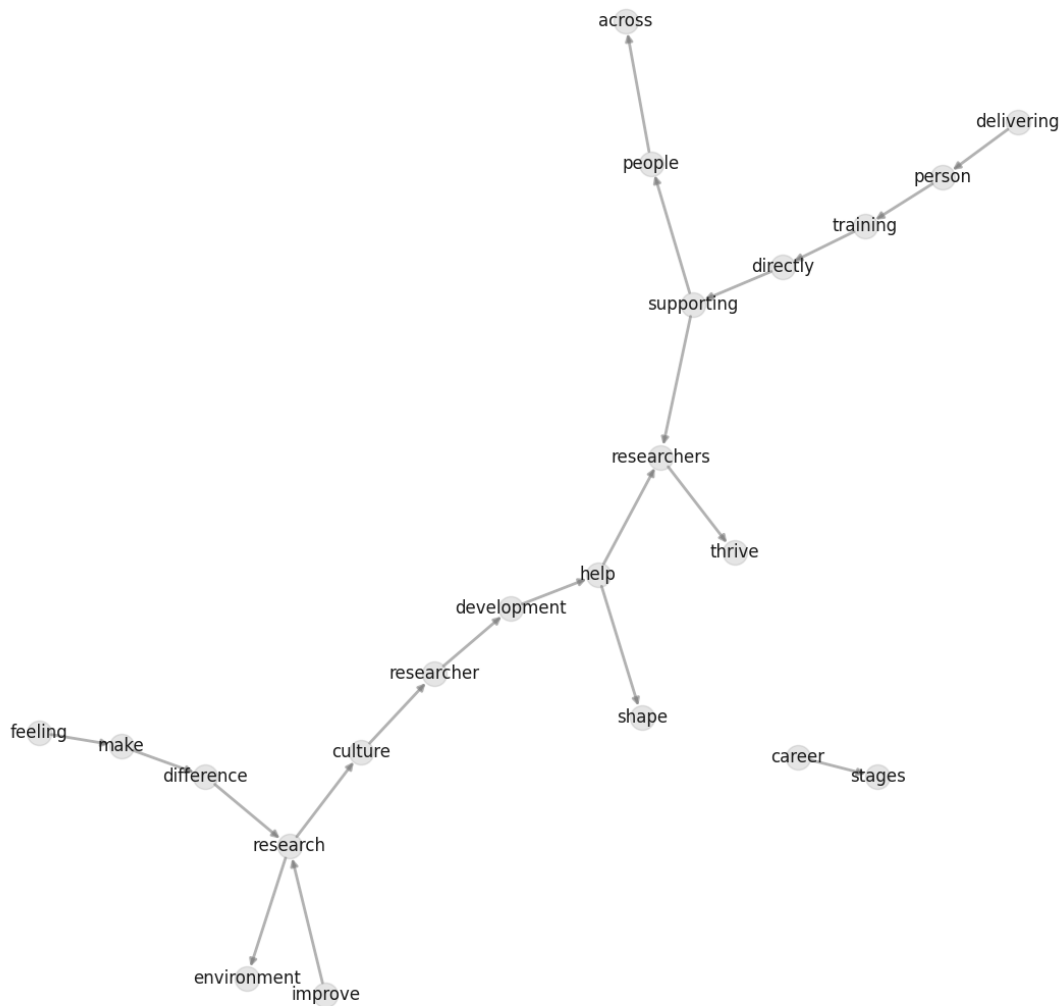
Staying up to date

Respondents reported using WonkHE (27), LinkedIn (21), the Times Higher Education (20) to stay up to date with sector developments. Additionally, respondents used UKRIO (18), ARMA (17), funder newsletters (13) and Research Professional (13). REF news alerts were also used by 11 respondents. X (Twitter) is now less popular in Higher Education at 10 respondents, but

few use the alternative Mastodon (2). HEPI was used by 5 respondents, with Vitae, UKCGE and other networks at 2. One respondent used the EDICa newsletter.



What do people enjoy about their roles?



The bigram below takes the most common combinations of words from the response to the question, 'What is the most enjoyable aspect of your role?' and shows how they relate to one another. We can see from this (and the word cloud) that respondents like to 'make (a) difference', 'improve research', 'help shape', 'help researchers', and be 'directly supporting people'. Respondents like to take an active role in building communities.

Conclusion

The insights shared by members of the Research Culture Enablers Network (RCEN) offer a valuable reflection of the current landscape of research culture in the UK. The contributions highlight an increasing focus on research leadership, psychological safety for all, recognition of diverse contributions, and the promotion of open and transparent research practices as critical priorities for advancing a more inclusive and supportive research culture.

This report underscores the important role of research culture professionals in driving these changes. There is noticeable momentum across the sector, with many institutions making strides to transform their research cultures and the teams that support them.

As an initiative of the National Centre for Research Culture (NCRC), RCEN serves as a platform for collaboration, enabling members to share insights, exchange best practices, and tackle the challenges facing the research community. Our ongoing focus will be on empowering research culture professionals, equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and connections needed to enhance culture change. As we move forward, we will continue to refine our approach based on member priorities and the evolving needs of the sector.

We thank all who have contributed to this report and look forward to working together to shape the future of research culture.

Join the network: warwick.ac.uk/RCEN

Appendix – Survey questions

Research Culture at your Institution

1. Type of institution
2. Where does the research culture enabling individual or team sit?
3. If other, please specify
4. Who at your institution has >50% of their time allocated to research culture
5. If other, please specify
6. Which of the following types of research culture activities or initiatives take place at your institution?
7. If other, please specify
8. Which of the following charters, awards and commitments is your institution signed up to?
9. If other, please specify

Your Research Enabler Role

10. What is your current job title?
11. Salary range
12. FTE
13. Scope
14. Research Culture covers wide-ranging challenges, including:
15. In your role do you actively work to improve the challenges listed above?
16. What are some tasks that you carry out in your research culture enabling role?
17. If other, please specify
18. Which other networks are you part of?
19. What is the most enjoyable aspect of your role?
20. What relevant training, if any, have you undertaken since starting this role?
21. Are there any relevant training opportunities you have identified?
22. Which of the following training would you be interested in?
23. What sources do you use to keep up to date with the latest developments in research culture?
24. If other, please specify

Next Steps

25. Any suggestions for what RCEN should do next?
26. Can you suggest any speakers to invite to future RCEN meetings?