UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

Responsible Research Culture

Together we engage, enable and empower



Responsible research culture: together we enable, engage and empower

At the University of Leicester, we are proud of our heritage and reputation as a leading research-intensive institution. As Citizens of Change, our researchers are committed to addressing the most pressing challenges of our time, whether that is combating disease, protecting our natural environment, advancing social justice, or delivering a sustainable future.

Continued delivery of transformative research in a rapidly changing world requires more than discovery — it demands a resilient and inclusive culture. Our Research Culture Framework outlines our shared values and the institutional practices that will shape the future of the research environment at Leicester. It also affirms our commitment to cultivating an inclusive environment where researchers, and those who support research, feel valued, supported and empowered.

We are building on strong foundations. Across our institution, we've started building a vibrant, inclusive research culture, and now we're bringing these initiatives together into one framework. By formalising our vision, this Research Culture Framework recognises the brilliant work already underway and lay the groundwork for continued transformation, excellence, and belonging. It's also a key component of our institutional World-Changing Research & Enterprise theme and directly complements the 'Our Citizens' theme of the University strategy.

Our co-created framework is designed as a living document. You are invited to embed these principles into your research practice and embrace a collective vision of responsibility and excellence—where we enable progress, engage with integrity, and empower one another.



Richard Thomas

Professor Richard Thomas

Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research & Innovation

Introduction and context

What is research culture?

UKRI[1] and the Royal Society define Research Culture as 'the behaviours, values, expectations, attitudes and norms of our research communities'. It influences researchers' career paths and determines the way that research is conducted and communicated.

Why does research culture matter?

In 2020, Wellcome Trust launched the largest ever Research Culture Survey, capturing views of over 4000 researchers in the UK and globally. This highlighted the persistence of poor research culture in some HEIs, leading to 'unhealthy competition, bullying and harassment, and mental health issues'[2].

Innovation, collaboration, and impact, are all inhibited by the absence of a healthy research culture. A research culture is not a top-down initiative or something that can be imposed – it is a shared philosophy—one that grows organically through individual behaviours, and nurtured within groups of researchers through shared commitment and lived practice.

A positive research culture is vital because it promotes integrity through ethical, transparent, and responsible practices. It enables meaningful collaboration by fostering trust and teamwork, within and across disciplines. Ultimately, a healthy research culture sustains excellence and drives lasting societal impact by motivating high-quality work and ensuring the credibility of research within and beyond academic institutions.

Recognising this importance, funders are placing increased emphasis on the research environment as part of grant application evaluations. Research England are also elevating the emphasis on research culture within the next Research Excellence Framework (REF2029).

Who are the beneficiaries?

Every member of the university has a role to play in ensuring that research is delivered responsibly and to contribute to a vibrant and inclusive research environment. Beneficiaries include:

- **Academic Researchers:** A robust research culture ensures ethical standards, promotes collaboration, and supports researcher wellbeing, directly influencing the quality and impact of scholarship.
- **Early-career researchers, postgraduate researchers & undergraduate students:** Exposure to a positive research culture fosters learning, mentorship, and the development of critical research skills within an inclusive and supportive environment; it also provides an example of good practice to be mirrored in the future.
- **Institutional Leaders and Administrators:** A healthy research culture maximises the opportunities for delivering on strategic objectives, attracts talent, enhances reputation, and supports sustainable growth within research organisations.
- **Policy Makers and Funders:** Transparent and accountable research practices provide trustworthy evidence to guide policy decisions and allocate resources effectively.

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[1] What is research culture? https://www.ukri.org/publications/explainer-research-culture/explainer-how-ukri-is-supporting-research-culture/

[2] What researchers think about the culture they work in (2020); https://wellcome.org/sites/default/files/what-researchers-think-about-the-culture-they-work-in.pdf

- **Industry and Commercial Partners:** A strong research culture promotes innovation, interdisciplinary engagement, and responsible use of research in real-world applications.
- **Publics:** Trust in research is shaped by the integrity, inclusivity, and accessibility of the research environment, which affects public engagement and societal benefit.

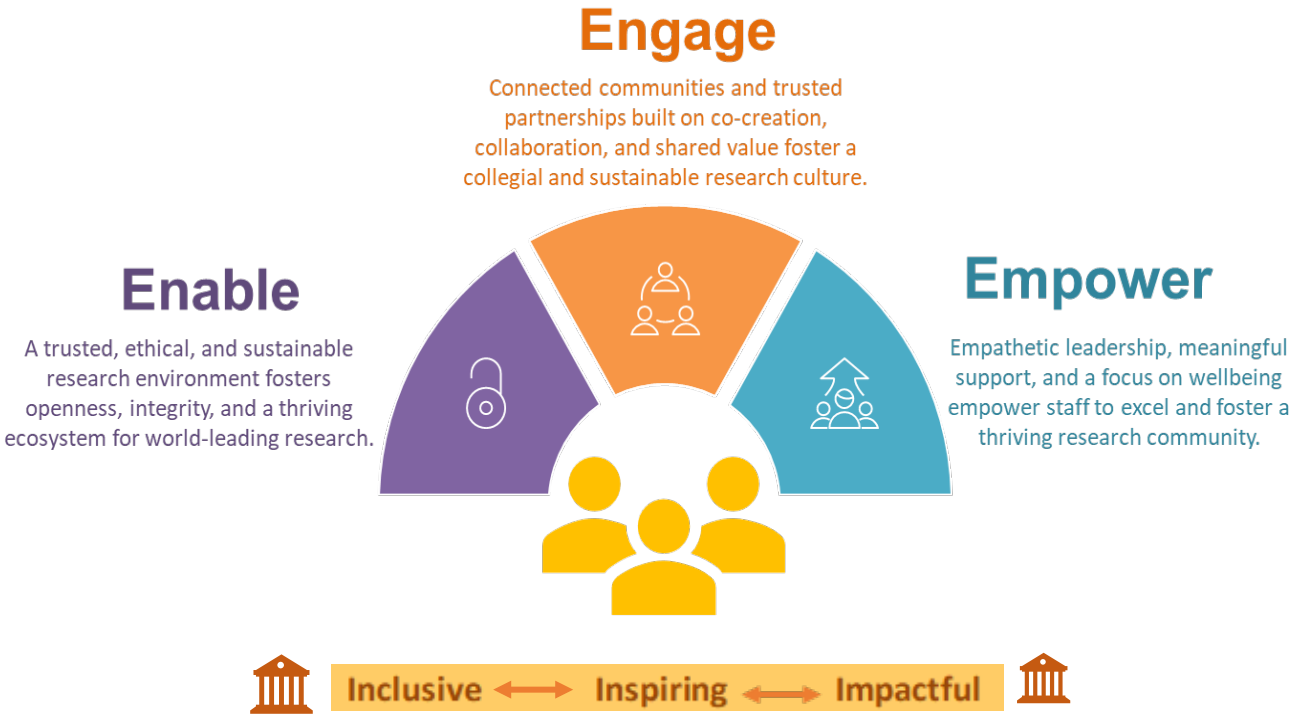
Developing a research culture framework

Strong foundations present a valuable opportunity to shape a robust research culture framework;

- There is an established research architecture (Schools, Institutes, Centres) which promotes disciplinary and interdisciplinary excellence;
- You are able to pioneer a culture of empathic leadership;
- You are firmly embedded within our local and regional research ecosystem (Civic Universities Partnership, Midlands Innovation) and have strong international partnerships;
- Our location is one the most diverse cities in the UK and have a diverse student body;
- Our Citizens of Change branding and institutional values of 'inclusive, inspiring and impactful' is an excellent foundation of principles and behaviours.

Our framework: vision

Drawing on our distinctiveness, values, and strategy, we have developed a vision for research culture, underpinned by our institutional values of 'Inclusive', 'Inspiring' and 'Impactful' and centred on three pillars: enable, engage and empower.



Our framework is informed by the Vitae Research Culture Framework[3], which was commissioned by UK Research Innovation. It identifies 13 elements of research culture grouped under four key themes. The following tables, describe what these themes mean for colleagues at the University of Leicester and highlights key sources of information.

[3] Research Culture Framework - https://vitae.ac.uk/policy/research-culture/

Alongside the framework, we outline a set of institutional commitments designed to reinforce and advance our research culture:

- **Environment for responsible research:** Grounded in sector best practice, we are deepening our commitment to transparency, reproducibility, and ethical integrity. We will embed these principles more robustly across training, policy, and research dissemination.
- **Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI):** Building on many local and institutional initiatives, we will advance a culture where every voice is valued. Our framework strengthens monitoring, support, and visibility for EDI at every level.
- **Support across career stages:** We will expand our well-established mentoring schemes and leadership programmes, strengthening support for researchers at every career stage, from postgraduate researchers to senior academics.
- **Recognition & reward:** Existing efforts to celebrate research beyond metrics have inspired our next steps. We will further recognise contributions in open research, mentorship, interdisciplinary collaborations, and collegiality — reinforcing values that are commonplace across our institution.
- **Engagement & dialogue:** We've learned that research culture thrives where dialogue is active and meaningful. That's why we'll expand opportunities for researchers to help shape policy and culture — from surveys to institutional fora. (Coproduction)

How research is managed and undertaken

Why is it important?

A thriving research culture is built on a foundation of ethics, integrity, and responsibility. Whether you are a Principal Investigator, researcher, or part of the research support team, these principles apply to all of us. The values and behaviours we demonstrate today will shape how our next generation of researchers will think, act and lead. Every role contributes to the collective responsibility of ensuring our research is ethically sound; conducted with integrity; sustainable; transparent and; aligned with institutional and national policies.

Key aspects

Research Management

The strategic and operational coordination of research activities, ensuring projects are well-planned, resourced, monitored, and aligned with institutional, legal, and funding requirements. It encompasses governance, compliance, budgeting and reporting throughout the research lifecycle.

Research Ethics

The principles and standards that guide researchers to conduct studies in ways that respect the rights, dignity, and welfare of participants, communities, and the environment. Ethical research involves informed consent, confidentiality, fairness, and minimising harm.

Research Integrity

The commitment to honesty, transparency, and accountability in all aspects of research. This includes accurate data collection and reporting, proper attribution of authorship, avoidance of plagiarism and fabrication, and adherence to disciplinary norms and standards.

Trusted Research

Research that is conducted securely, transparently, and in ways that protect intellectual property, sensitive data, and national interests. It involves safeguarding against misuse, foreign interference, and ensuring collaborations are ethical and compliant with security protocols.

Responsible Research

Research that is socially and environmentally conscious, inclusive, and aligned with public good. It considers the broader impact of research on society, promotes open access, and encourages engagement with stakeholders and communities.

Sustainability

Integrating environmental, economic, and social sustainability into research practices. This includes reducing waste, using resources efficiently, designing low-impact methodologies, and contributing to long-term societal & planetary wellbeing.

Health and Safety

Ensuring that all research activities are conducted in environments that protect the wellbeing of researchers, participants, and the public. This includes risk assessments, safe lab practices, emergency preparedness, and compliance with health and safety regulations.

Key competencies and behaviours

The Vitae framework outlines some competencies for all to follow;

- Upholding the highest standards of **rigour and integrity**
- Being **accountable** for all aspects of the research process
- Being **transparent** and hones about all aspects of the research process
- Ensuring the **efficient** use of finances, resource and infrastructure
- Considering the **sustainability** and impact of research on the environment and people

Resources and further reading:

Research & Enterprise Division (RED): Ethics; Research Integrity; Trusted research; Research Code of Conduct.
Key contacts: Research Governance Office, RED.

How individuals engage with others

Why is it important?

The culture of research is shaped by the quality of engagement across institutional, disciplinary, and societal boundaries. Environments that promote respectful, inclusive, and empowering practices foster trust, facilitate collaboration, and uphold ethical standards.

Structured engagement mechanisms — including transparent communication channels, inclusive governance, and collaborative platforms — support the exchange of diverse perspectives and strengthen collegiality. These systems contribute to a research culture grounded in openness, integrity, and shared purpose, enabling both ideas and innovation to flourish.

Key aspects

Leadership and management

Effective leadership and management shape the environment in which you work, collaborate, and grow. They're not just about oversight — they influence team dynamics, research integrity, and the long-term success of your projects. Strong research leadership provides clarity, direction, and support. It fosters collaboration, promotes ethical practice, and creates a space where you feel respected, empowered, and motivated. Good leaders also mentor and invest in your development, helping you navigate challenges and build confidence. You also play a role in shaping leadership and management culture. Through feedback, reflection, and active participation, you help build a research environment that values transparency, growth, and shared responsibility.

Community, collaboration and collegiality

Research thrives on connection — it is rarely a solitary pursuit. You are part of a vibrant and diverse community that includes peers, mentors, collaborators, and support staff across disciplines and institutions. This network is essential not only for intellectual exchange but also for emotional and professional support.

A strong research culture actively fosters collaboration by creating spaces for interdisciplinary dialogue, encouraging co-authorship and joint projects, and supporting inclusive team dynamics. It values openness — where ideas are shared freely, feedback is constructive, and learning is mutual. Through seminars, research networks, and informal peer interactions, you build relationships that can shape your thinking, challenge your assumptions, and open new avenues for exploration. These connections help to feel a sense of belonging within the wider research community.

Empowering others

As a researcher, empowerment means being trusted to lead, innovate, and make decisions that shape your work and its impact. It involves having access to the resources, support, and freedom needed to pursue your ideas, while also being encouraged to collaborate, mentor, and contribute to the wider research community.

Empowering others also means lifting those around you — sharing knowledge, offering guidance, and creating space for diverse voices. Whether you're mentoring a colleague, co-authoring across disciplines, or advocating for inclusive practices, your actions help build a culture where everyone can thrive.

Key competencies and behaviours

The Vitae framework outlines some competencies for all to follow;

- Providing responsive and **empathetic** line management
- Providing honest and **constructive feedback**
- Valuing and responding to differences in **supporting others**
- **Recognising that our own behaviours shape cultures**
- Encouraging a culture of **reflection** and learning from experience
- Creating **welcoming and inclusive** communities for all
- Recognising individual and diverse contributions, **advocating for others**

Resources and further reading:

Research Culture Hub

How research ensures value

Why is it important?

Delivering value through research is not a supplementary objective — it is integral to the research process itself. A well-functioning research ecosystem enhances visibility, accessibility, and impact through coordinated mechanisms and strategic alignment. Prioritising value involves extending the reach of research beyond academic boundaries, ensuring outputs are communicated effectively, shared widely, and responsive to societal needs.

Public engagement, knowledge exchange, open access, and collaborative partnerships serve as key enablers in amplifying the relevance and utility of research. When embedded within institutional strategy, these practices contribute to reputational strength, drive innovation, and support meaningful societal transformation. A value-oriented research culture ensures that outputs are recognised not only within scholarly domains but also across policy, industry, education, and public discourse — reinforcing the role of research as a catalyst for progress.

Key aspects

Research Impact

Research Impact is about ensuring our work makes a meaningful contribution beyond academia — whether influencing policy, driving innovation, improving lives, or enriching culture. Thinking about impact from the outset helps you align your research with real-world needs and opportunities.

Knowledge Exchange

This involves building relationships with external partners such as businesses, charities, government bodies, and community groups. These collaborations can enrich your research, provide new perspectives, and help translate findings into practical solutions. Knowledge exchange benefits all parties— it's about co-creation, mutual learning, and shared value.

Public Engagement

Connecting with the wider public and sharing your research in accessible ways is a fantastic way of building trust, inspiring curiosity and ensures your work reflects diverse perspectives and societal values. It promotes transparency and inclusivity, helps demystify research and enriches research outcomes.

Open Research (including Open Access & Open Data)

Open Research is about making your research outputs freely available to others. This supports transparency, reproducibility, and global collaboration. By sharing your publications, datasets, and methodologies openly, you contribute to a more equitable and efficient research ecosystem — one where knowledge can be built upon and reused responsibly.

Communicating your research

Communicating your research plays a vital role in making research clear, accessible, and relevant to varied audiences. It enhances visibility and understanding, builds interdisciplinary and cross-sector connections, and empowers researchers to advocate for their work and its societal relevance. Tailoring your message to different audiences — academic, professional, or public — ensures your research is understood and appreciated by those it aims to serve.

Key competencies and behaviours

The Vitae framework outlines some competencies for all to follow;

- Supporting **open, collaborative, interdisciplinary** and team-based approaches to research
- Understanding what value and **impact** means for different stakeholders
- Ensuring research is **understandable, explainable, reproducible and accessible**
- Connecting with others in accessible and inclusive language and media
- Sharing research, data and other outputs **openly**
- Be open to **new forms of communication** methods and spaces

How people are supported

Why is it important?

People are the driving force behind a vibrant and evolving research culture. The experiences, aspirations, and contributions of individuals shape not only the direction of research but also the environment in which it unfolds. Support matters — whether it's access to mentoring, inclusive policies, professional development, or simply feeling valued and heard.

When researchers are empowered through meaningful opportunities, clear values, and a supportive infrastructure, their work becomes more impactful, their careers more sustainable, and their wellbeing more protected. A culture that invests in people — at every stage and in every role — fosters creativity, collaboration, and resilience. It's through this collective care and commitment that research reaches its full potential.

Key aspects

Career Pathways and Progression

You should have access to clear, flexible, and fair career pathways that reflect the diversity of roles and contributions in research. Whether your path leads through academia, industry, leadership, teaching, or a combination of these, a healthy research culture provides the foundation for your progression — offering clear expectations, meaningful recognition of diverse contributions, and access to opportunities that support your growth.

Wellbeing and Inclusion

Your wellbeing and the wellbeing of your colleagues matters. A positive research culture prioritises mental health, work-life balance, and inclusive practices that ensure you feel respected and supported. You should be able to work in an environment free from discrimination, where diverse perspectives are welcomed and valued and this should be adopted when interacting and collaborating with others.

Professional Development

Your growth as a researcher is continuous, no matter your career stage. Whether you're just beginning your journey, establishing your independence, or leading major projects, each phase brings new challenges, opportunities, and areas for development. Early-career researchers may focus on building foundational skills — from designing robust methodologies and securing funding to publishing and presenting with confidence. Mid-career researchers often refine their leadership abilities, expand their networks, and take on mentoring roles. Senior researchers continue to evolve by shaping strategic direction, influencing policy, and fostering the next generation of researchers.

A healthy research culture recognises that learning never stops and provides training opportunities tailored to your needs e.g. research ethics, data management, communication, grant writing, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Research Support

You are not expected to do everything alone. A strong support system — including research support expertise, technical staff, librarians, and administrative teams — helps you focus on your research. From support with the initial concept/idea to publishing outputs and reporting outcomes, these roles are essential to your success and should be valued as part of the research ecosystem.

Key competencies and behaviours

The Vitae framework outlines some competencies for all to follow;

- **Working collectively** to address development needs at all career stages
- Ensuring the research environment is **accessible, inclusive and equitable for all**
- Engaging in regular **career development reviews**
- **Zero tolerance of and taking action against bullying and harassment**

Resources and further reading:

Research & Enterprise Division (RED): Doctoral College



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