

**NI RESEARCH  
CULTURE  
NETWORK**



**QUEEN'S  
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# Northern Ireland Research Culture Network

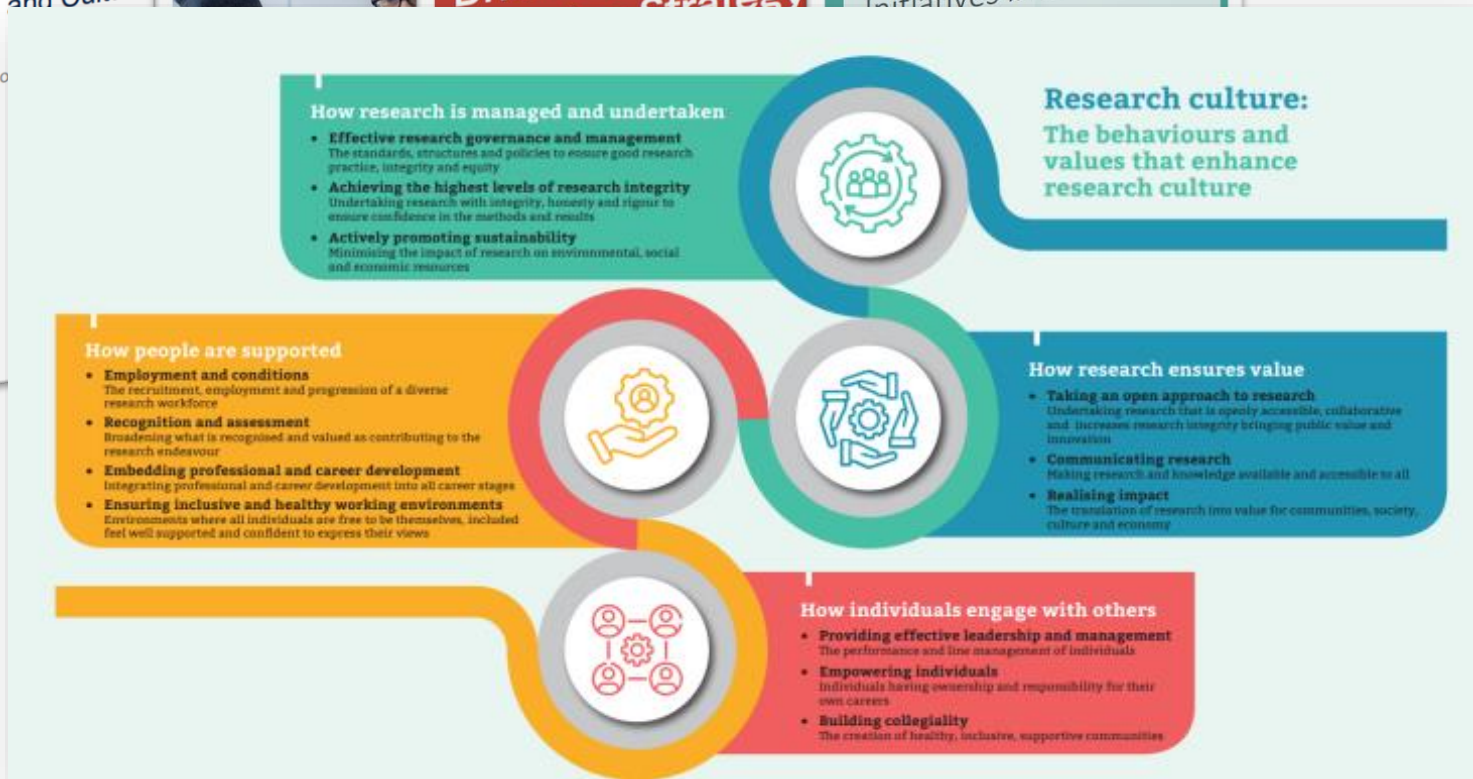
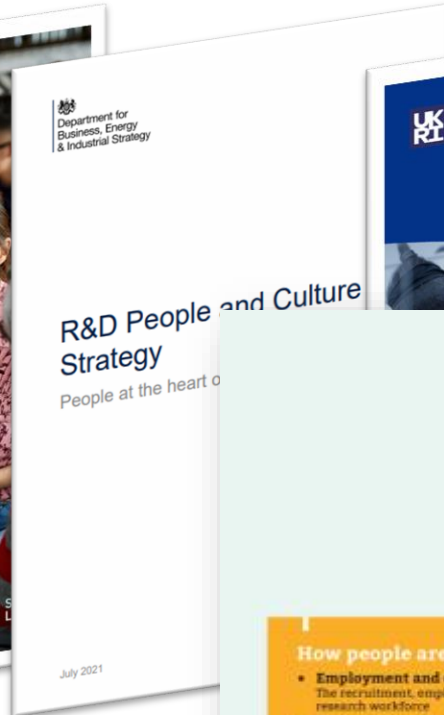
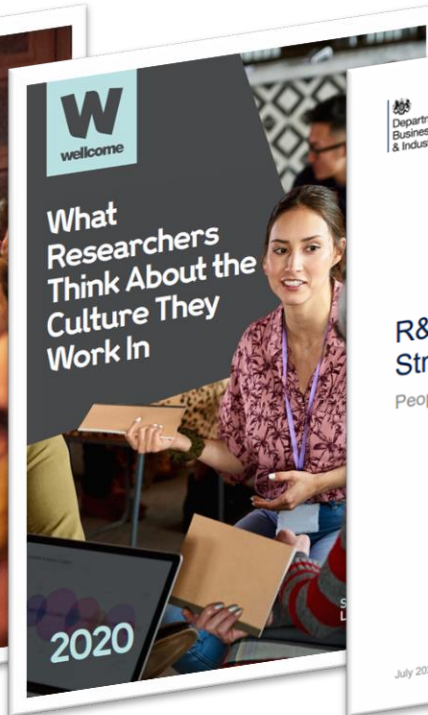
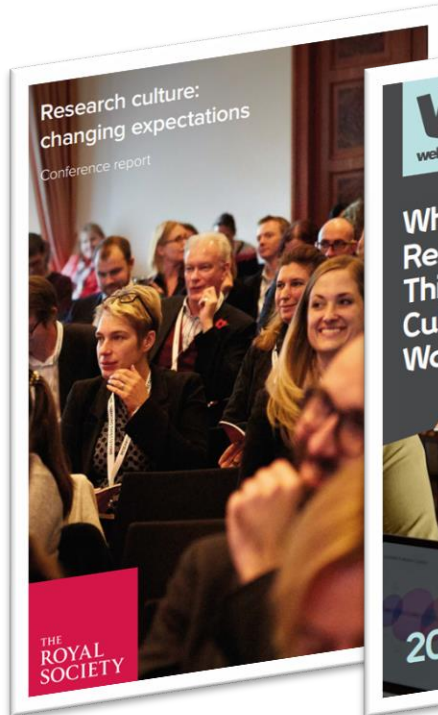
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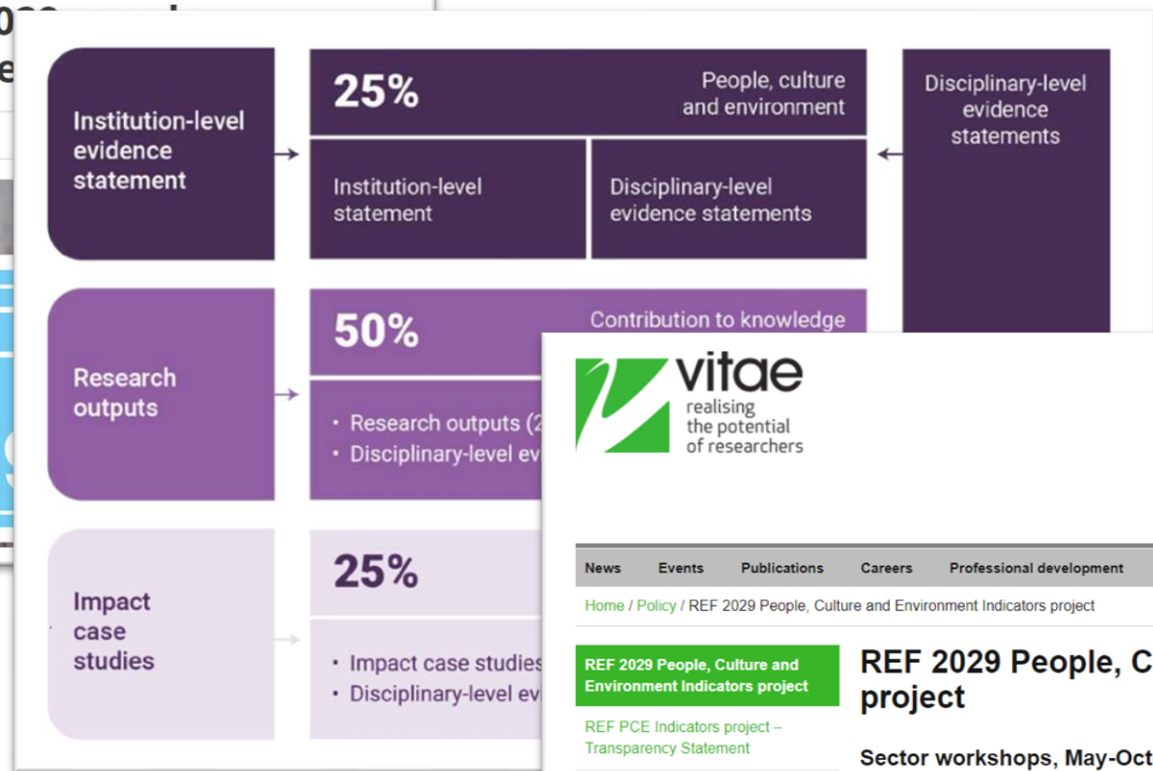




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# Confirmation of REF 2029 culture and environme

By Chris Parr



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**REF 2029 People, Culture and Environment Indicators project**

REF PCE Indicators project – Transparency Statement

## REF 2029 People, Culture and Environment Indicators project

### Sector workshops, May-October 2024

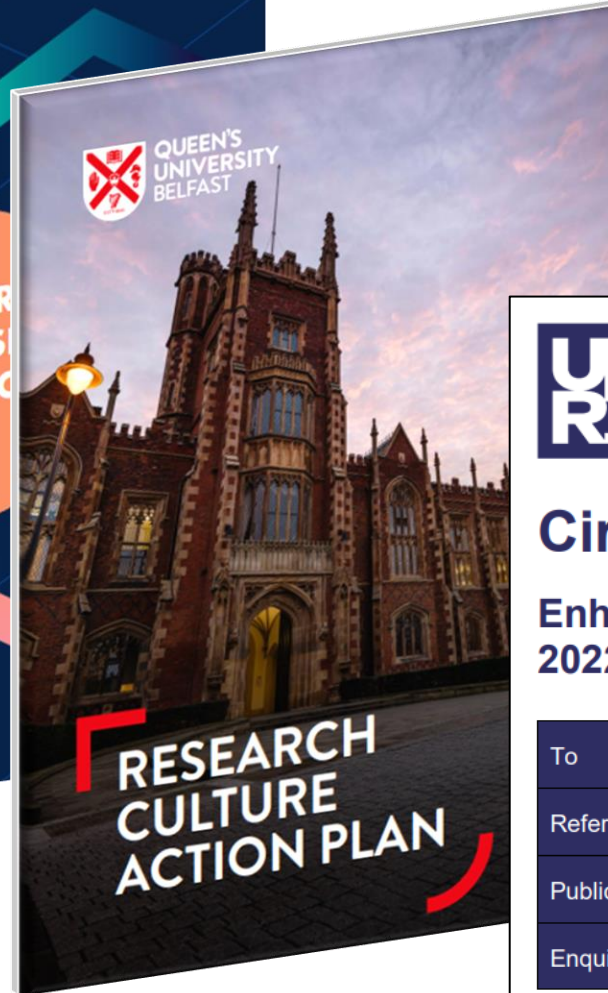
**Expressions of interest are now closed.** We hope to let everyone know of the outcome by Friday 17 May.

#### What are the workshops?

We are running 14 online workshops in May-October 2024 to co-develop indicators on research culture and environment. The workshops are divided into three phases, allowing for reflection and iteration with the sector. The approach is informed by the [SCOPE Framework for Responsible Research Assessment](#).

• University research culture strategies and webpages:

- Cardiff University
- Imperial College London
- London School of Economics and Political Science
- Middlesex University
- Newcastle University
- Queen's University Belfast
- University College London
- University of Aberdeen
- University of Bath
- University of Birmingham
- University of Bristol
- University of Cambridge
- University of Edinburgh
- University of Glasgow
- University of Leeds
- University of Oxford
- University of Southampton
- University of St. Andrews
- University of Stirling
- University of Warwick



## Circular letter

### Enhancing Research Culture grant allocations 2022-23

To	Heads of Research England-funded higher education providers
Reference	RE-CL-2022-06
Publication date	20 September 2022
Enquiries to	<a href="mailto:researchpolicy@re.ukri.org">researchpolicy@re.ukri.org</a>

# NORTHERN IRELAND'S RESEARCH CULTURE

## OPPORTUNITIES

- R&I seen as critical to economic recovery, growth and productivity
- Proximity to decision-makers, research users, and each other
- Operating in the UK system, but share a border with RoI/ EU
- Track record for world-leading research and innovation outcomes

## CHALLENGES

- Less well-developed research ecosystem (and limited information the people and teams within it)
- Low levels of public funding and private R&D activity
- Not as well connected as we should be – intra and inter sector
- Geographical context brings complexity (UK and RoI)
- Limited opportunities to develop and utilise talent
- Low awareness of full diversity of career trajectories

# THE PROPOSAL

- Challenges are shared – can't be solved by one party in isolation
- Small region, with limited funding – need to do more with less
- Queen's invited to apply, and brought Ulster into the fold from outset
- Recognised all-island dimension, and built upon UCD partnership
- **Collaboratively** identified issues and developed a plan – building on existing RC initiatives at both institutions
- **Prioritised** activities likely to have biggest impact in short two year funding window available
- Once outline plan agreed, **harnessed the opportunity** by
  - securing commitment for **follow-on funding**
  - obtaining support from key **partners** (gov't, funder, industry)
- **Successfully funded for ~£650k / 2 years**
- **Secured 2 additional years from both universities**

**Wellcome Trust Institutional Funding for Research Culture  
Proposal: Northern Ireland Research Culture Initiative (NIRCI)**

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**1. Introduction and Context**

Science and innovation are at the heart of UK Government's plans for economic growth. The [Science and Technology Framework](#) aspires for the UK to become a global 'science superpower', however, a core economic challenge is poor productivity driven by low levels of R&D and innovation, particularly outside of London and the [South-East](#). To address this, significant new funding has been allocated to science, with the Government recognising that a thriving research culture that nurtures people and talent is critical to realising its goal.

The regional economic strategy for Northern Ireland (NI) - '[10x Economy](#)' - prioritises research and innovation (R&I), and aspires for NI to become a globally competitive small advanced economy; however, it faces a particularly difficult economic context, e.g. [lowest productivity of any UK region](#) (17% below UK average), and insufficient R&D expenditure. It also has the lowest draw-down of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) funds, and block grants for R&I (QR and HEIF) have not increased since 2017 (England +30.4%, Scotland +7.3%, Wales +31%).

Despite this, the universities in NI are well-positioned to play a leading role in delivering this vision, having demonstrated world-leading R&I outcomes, evidenced by the recent Research Excellence Framework and consistent recognition as a UK leader for academic research commercialisation. They share a unique geographical context e.g. proximity to industry, [government](#) and an EU member state, and are collaborating on emerging opportunities through investment in e.g. [Belfast Region City Deal \(BRCD\) Innovation Centres](#).

To realise its economic vision and societal potential, NI needs a thriving research culture; however, shared barriers to this exist in HE and the wider R&I ecosystem, which cannot be addressed effectively by any one organisation acting in isolation. These include:

- Poor connectivity/integration between stakeholders, creating barriers to mutual understanding of challenges and shared solutions, inter- and trans-disciplinary and multi-partner research opportunities, and mobility between sectors
- Under-utilisation of research talent driven by a perception of limited development and advancement opportunities, and a lack of awareness of the full diversity of career paths
- A less mature research ecosystem, driven by the research funding gap and low R&D spend, and a lack of awareness and understanding of major research culture priorities and the needs of discrete groups within it

# THE PROJECT

- Establish **regional network**, including cross-sector Steering Board and Advisory Group
  - Steering Board – Oversight and direction for the programme
  - Advisory Group – Ensure all voices in the NI research community are heard
- **Four key workstreams** to be delivered during two years' funding
- Amplifying regional activities through new **all-island network**
- **Independent evaluation** element underpinning the entire project
- **Two years post-project are most important – harnessing opportunity**

## 1) Understanding the current research community and culture

- Independent research consultancy to conduct landscape review
- Awareness-raising campaign using findings from landscape review
- Develop regional research culture action plan

## 2) Enabling researcher career development and exploring alternative career pathways

- New Research Careers and Employability Officer (at Queen's, working with UU)
- Support, nurture and optimise the pool of research talent in NI
- Align with economic priorities and bridge connections with non-academic sectors

## 3) Strengthening capacity and networks for research professionals

- Establish and evolve 'NI Research Professionals Network'
- Two events per year to bring together research managers and administrators
- Represent NI in wider development of RMA as a profession

## 4) Enabling excellence in 'Practice as Research' in NI

- Develop a framework to ensure PaR is support, integrated and nurtured
- Facilitated thematic workshops between Queen's and UU
- Led by UU, linked to importance of creative industries for NI economy



# PROGRESS

- Project funding began on **1 April 2024**
- Focus to date on **recruitment to key posts** in project team
  - Research Culture Manager (Queen's)
  - Research Culture Manager (UU)
  - Research Careers and Employability Officer (Queen's)
  - Research Culture Assistant (Queen's)
- **Tenders to be published imminently** for third-party research consultancy and evaluation
- **NI Research Professionals Network established** and growing (~130 members)
- **Research Careers and Employability Officer** takes up post early June 2024
- **First meeting of Steering Board** imminent (June 2024) and Advisory Group (Sept 2024)

# CONCLUSION

- Wellcome IFRC funding has **enabled activities that would not otherwise have occurred**
- Including a **prime example of the potential for partnership** within the region
- Encouraged both institutions to **establish and embed research culture teams**
- Created a **pathway to a regional research culture action plan**
- Contributed to the establishment of an **all-island approach to research culture**