



Future Leaders Fellow Open Letter Signatories

Sent by email

05 May 2022

Dear Future Leaders Fellows,

Thank you so much for your thoughtful letter to Andrew Mackenzie and myself and for your leadership on these important issues.

The UK's Universities are a great national asset. They have a key role to play enriching lives locally, nationally and globally, and building the high productivity, innovation-led economy needed for UK prosperity and to tackle global challenges. The dual role of universities in teaching and training, and research and innovation is key to delivering these goals.

As set out in our Strategy, this requires diversity, connectivity, resilience and engagement across universities and research-conducting organisations more widely. Current incentives in the system can work against these essential properties. Furthermore, performance measures that may be relevant for assessing institutions are often mapped down onto individual researchers, creating intense pressures on individuals to perform against narrow criteria that can work against high quality research and innovation and create poor research cultures.

Changing these incentives is critical both to supporting diversity and collaboration among research organisations and to addressing the intense pressures many researchers currently endure. The creation of UKRI provides an unprecedented opportunity to do this. UKRI spans all disciplines, and is a key funder for universities through studentships, fellowships, research grants, infrastructure, commercialisation and knowledge exchange funding across the UK, and through block grants in England.

This is about profound culture change. It will not be fast and it will require everyone to act together, trialling interventions and carefully considering the full implications of each one. Many of the problems we currently face arguably stem from an accumulation of specific fixes aimed at single issues. The solutions needed are systemic and require answers to complex questions such as:

- What is the right balance of public research and innovation funding for universities between block grants, studentships, fellowships, research grants, infrastructure, commercialisation and knowledge exchange funding?
- How can we best support the diversity of universities that we need, with different missions locally, nationally and on the global stage?



- How can we create research cultures where collaboration between people with the many different skill sets needed is recognised and rewarded?
- How can we incentivise the right balance of roles, and a diversity of rewarding careers, spanning not only universities but the wider research and innovation system?
- How can we breakdown the siloes that separate disciplines, sectors, and research and innovation from wider society, constraining creativity and adoption and diffusion of ideas, knowhow and innovation?

We need to work together to answer these questions and design lasting solutions to the problems so acutely felt right across the UK. As people, organisations and institutions, collectively we have the power to solve them. Individually, we do not.

Interventions UKRI is trialling and supporting include:

- **The Resume for Research and Innovation (R4RI):** a narrative style CV recognising the crucial and varied roles of researchers and innovators, not only in knowledge creation, but also in training and mentoring others, supporting the research and innovation system and engaging with wider society.
- **Changes in the grant funding application process:** interventions such as double-blind peer review, and two-step applications with most information required only at later stages when success rates are much higher.
- **Research England Enhancing Research Culture Fund:** £30m provided to English universities to trial interventions to improve research culture.

Work UKRI is conducting to design further interventions includes:

- **An end-to-end review of peer review.** This will examine the incentives, strengths and weaknesses of the current approach to identify improvements that would positively impact research and innovation culture.
- **The Future Research Assessment Programme (FRAP).** In collaboration with the HE funding bodies of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, FRAP aims to explore approaches to the assessment of UK higher education research performance that encourage and strengthen the delivery of excellent research and impact, and support a positive research culture.
- **The New Deal for Postgraduate Research:** This is a long-term piece of work that aims to improve the experience and quality of postgraduate research training in the UK.
- **The Simpler Better Funding programme:** This aims to reduce bureaucracy in the system and create a research and innovation environment that enables people and teams to focus on delivering exciting, and ambitious research and innovation goals



**UK Research
and Innovation**

Some of the fora we are convening to co-create solutions include:

- The UK Committee on Research Integrity
- The UK Forum on Tackling Bullying and Harassment
- The Community Adoption of R4RI
- Future Leaders Fellowships networks and events

The need for change is urgent as your letter powerfully illustrates. UKRI has a critical role to play and we are working hard to deliver on our responsibilities. We most certainly do not always get things right and we understand and share the frustration over the slow pace of change.

There are many ideas across the community about how best to drive change. We are keen to work with partners to explore, prioritise and trial these ideas, and to catalyse adoption of good practice wherever it is found. I would be happy to discuss the specific ideas you set out in your letter. For example, developing best practice on transparent workload allocation models would be one area to explore.

Thank you again for your leadership and commitment to positive action.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ottoline Leyser', written in a cursive style.

Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser

Chief Executive, UK Research and Innovation