Research Symposium 2025: Enablers and Inhibitors of Thriving Research Cultures

17 June 2025, Virtual delivery

Session abstracts

Oral presentation – 10:20-11:20

1.1a Standardising OSCEs in Physician Associate Education: Enhancing Fairness, Reliability and Research-Informed Assessment Culture

Esin Turkaslan, Buckkinghamshire New University

This session explores the standardisation of OSCEs in Physician Associate education as a powerful lever for fairness, accountability, and alignment with GMC standards. Drawing on a qualitative, literature-based analysis, it addresses examiner variability, inconsistencies in marking, and the lack of calibration practices that undermine assessment integrity. The findings offer strategic recommendations for structured marking, external quality assurance, and examiner training. Positioned within the interpretivist paradigm, this work reframes OSCE standardisation as a leadership-driven, evidence-informed intervention to embed justice in clinical education and shape a more inclusive, credible and excellence-focused assessment culture.

Oral presentation – 10:20-11:20

1.1b Enhancing Research Culture through Interdisciplinary Collaboration on PGR Supervisor Training

Dr Hannah Grist, University of Bristol

Join Dr. Hannah Grist (BILT) and Professor Stephanie King (Health and Life Sciences) as they present the University of Bristol's innovative approach to postgraduate research (PGR) supervisor training. This UKRI-funded initiative, launched in 2023/24, fosters inclusivity and collaboration by addressing key supervisory challenges. Co-created with Faculty PGR Directors, the training aligns with UKCGE best practices and has expanded across faculties. By strengthening supervisor support, enriching the student experience, and promoting interdisciplinary engagement, this scalable model advances Bristol's research culture vision—empowering supervisors and students alike. Discover how this pioneering approach is shaping the future of research supervision.

Oral presentation – 10:20-11:20

1.2a "You shall go to the ball!": Overcoming inhibitors to promote a Higher Education Research culture at RGU.

Dr Rachel McGregor, Robert Gordon University

Higher Education Research (HER) can enhance institutional practices and learners' experiences. It also provides an inclusive way into research. Yet, HER remains an undervalued 'Cinderella of academia', often lacking research infrastructure and being dispersed across institutions. This paper examines how Robert Gordon University (RGU) has addressed these inhibitors and promoted a thriving HER culture at the institution. Applying theories of organisational culture, it analyses former barriers and the strategic initiatives that transformed HER culture at RGU. The insights will be applicable to others seeking to nurture HER and other undervalued and/or interdisciplinary research areas that traverse organisational units.

Oral presentation – 10:20-11:20
1.2b Supporting future research leaders to develop healthy research cultures
Dr Katie Nicoll Baines, Future Leaders Fellows Development Network

Future leader's fellows (FLFs) have been positioned by UKRI as research culture enablers. The importance of inclusive research practice has been integral throughout the recruitment of FLFs and are embedded in the support provided to them by the network. We deliver leadership development initiatives to FLFs including toolkits, mentoring, coaching, training plus a package of flexible funding that they can access to design initiatives to complement and enhance existing network activity. Our toolkits are available under a creative commons licence and would like to showcase these resources with the wider community to improve transparency about navigating the research environment.

Oral presentaion– 11:35 - 12:20
2.1a EDIA: Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Adversity - Nurturing an inclusive research culture in the face of sector wide challenges
Josie Caplehorne, University of Kent

When adversity in any sector impacts everyone, it adversely affects marginalised communities, often creating new and widening existing barriers for them to otherwise have the opportunity to thrive within that environment. These insidious challenges permeate through communities, impacting research cultures across Higher Education, perpetuating non-inclusive practices of those working at its heart.

Join us to explore equality, diversity, inclusion and adversity, and opportunities to nurture inclusive research cultures for those who are disabled, chronically unwell, and/or neurodivergent, despite the resurging waves of challenges being acutely felt by all of us across the sector.

Poster vlog– 11:35 - 12:20

2.1b A shared effort: breaking down barriers towards a sustainable collaboration model for researcher development
Dr Stefania Silvestri, University of Liverpool

The Prosper Exchange aims to foster collaboration across professional researcher enablers, particularly those with an interest in and responsibility for supporting career development of postdoctoral researchers and their managers. By promoting different levels of collaboration, the Prosper Exchange seeks to break down barriers and silos between disciplines and institutions. This poster will showcase the main elements of the Prosper Exchange, its aims, and its potential impact. It will also present case studies as evidence of the impact achieved by the Prosper Exchange and the positive outcomes attained through this collaborative approach.

Poster vlog– 11:35 - 12:20
2.1c Leading with Empathy: Co-designing a toolkit for Empathic and Inclusive Research Leadership
Dr Cleo White, University of Leicester

Research leaders set the tone for equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), yet many lack support and training. This gap leaves some struggling with complex EDI challenges, creating toxic research cultures that isolate underrepresented researchers. Through workshops and interviews, we explored how leaders can drive inclusion and empathy. Our findings reveal key barriers (systemic pressures, poor communication, unconscious biases) and enablers (open dialogue, belonging, supportive environments).

The next stage is to co-design a leadership toolkit with the University of Leicester's research community, developing strategies to break down barriers, foster empathy, and create lasting, positive change in research environments.

Vlog/Poster– 11:35 - 12:20
2.1d Barriers to Early Career Clinical Academic Careers for UK Medical Doctors: Challenges and Recommendations
Dr Mohammed Azib Zahid, Southend University Hospital

This review examines barriers facing early-career UK medical doctors pursuing clinical academic careers, identifying financial insecurity, heavy clinical workloads, insufficient mentorship, unclear career paths, institutional culture challenges, and diversity disparities as key issues. Drawing on the latest evidence, it outlines strategic solutions including protected research time, improved funding, structured mentorship, clearer career pathways, cultural shifts within NHS institutions, and inclusivity measures. Implementing these recommendations could significantly enhance recruitment, retention, and progression within clinical academia, fostering a robust clinician-researcher workforce essential for advancing medical innovation, healthcare quality, and patient outcomes in the UK.

Oral presentation – 13:10 - 14:40

3.1a Inaugurating a Vibrant Research Culture within Independent HE Providers.

Professor Richard Perks, Academy of Contemporary Music

This presentation will highlight the importance of – and agency provided by – designated research leadership within non-university HE institutions. Over the last year the author has worked as Associate Dean of Research at the Academy of Contemporary Music (ACM), an independent HE provider in the UK. Presented as a case study, this talk will outline the initial state of research at ACM, provide an overview of the initiatives implemented over the last year in this new role, and reflect upon each in terms of staff participation, perception and satisfaction (including an overall increase in high-quality research outputs and impact beyond academia).

Oral presentation – 13:10 - 14:40

3.1b Creating accessible fieldwork: inclusive research for diverse bodies and minds

Dr Kelsey Byers, John Innes Centre

Field-based experiences can be a cornerstone of science education and research, yet are often inaccessible to students and staff with disabilities, chronic health conditions, and/or neurodivergence. This has led to a demonstrated lack of disabled, chronically ill, and neurodivergent scientists in fieldwork-based careers. Building on my lived experiences as a disabled botanist and field team leader, as well as communication with others facing similar barriers, I will discuss fieldwork barriers faced by disabled, chronically ill, and neurodivergent individuals. I will then provide resources to allow instructors and fieldwork team leads to improve accessibility and inclusion in their own practice.

Oral presentation – 13:10 - 14:40

3.1c Research Culture Enhancement in Developing Countries through Establishing Performance-Based Research Funding (PBRF) Systems: Recommendations for Action

Professor Abdelbary Elhissi, College of Pharmacy, QU Health Cluster, Qatar University

Positive research culture is essential for advancing knowledge, promoting innovation and eliciting societal impact. Research quality at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can be promoted by using performance-based research funding (PBRF) Frameworks; one of the most established ones is the UK's Research excellence Framework (REF). Many developing countries aspire to build "knowledge-based economies"; thus, establishing a powerful research culture is essential. This session will introduce a reflection on the existing PBRF Frameworks, with the aim of providing recommendations for developing countries to establish PBRF Frameworks to cultivate a culture of research excellence and impact.

Oral presentation – 13:10 - 14:40
3.2a Reflections on a positive action funding initiative in the era of anti-DEI
Soo Lincoln, University of Leeds

Reflecting on lessons learned from two REDI (Research Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) funding calls at the University of Leeds. These positive action interventions support researchers with certain protected characteristics who are institutionally underrepresented in senior academic research, by funding career development activities.

Following an outline of the underpinning data, we explore the key decision-making points illustrating and discussing the dilemmas that were encountered and how these were tackled.

Pivotally, this presentation will seek to provoke debate around the risk of operating only in a 'deficit model' of action, where funding and case-by-case work provides targeted support for individuals but does not 'fix' systemic bias.

Oral presentation – 13:10 - 14:40
3.2b Exploring the successes and barriers to running an EDI Research Centre
Dr Karisha Kimone George, University of York

With the aim of embedding EDI within the Research culture at the University of York, the EDI-RC was established in 2024 through 2-year funding from the Enhancing Research culture scheme. It has since focused on enhancing the EDI research culture, taking into consideration how this culture impacts all individuals present within an HEI. The talk will explore the impact of the centre's work on undergraduates, PGTs, PGRs, and staff (including PSS, T&S and ART staff). It will critically evaluate the successes and challenges of the centre's journey, highlighting what others can learn should they choose to engage in similar ventures.

Oral presentation – 13:10 - 14:40
3.2c Enabling Inclusive and Supportive Research Environments through Internal Funding: Insights from the Collaborative Cultures Programme
Dr Chris Wells-Holland, University of Strathclyde

How can internal funding enable more inclusive and supportive research environments? This session will share learning from the University of Strathclyde's Collaborative Cultures Programme, a Wellcome Trust-funded initiative designed to foster inclusive collaboration practices within and beyond the university. The programme supported projects focused on access, recognition, and reward in collaborative research. This session will explore how internal funding can act as a catalyst for culture change, highlight examples from funded projects, and reflect on how collaborative partnerships across sectors can shape more inclusive research environments.