**CGHE Research on Research Webinar series - Webinar 2**

# Comparative insights from the CGHE Research on Research (RoR) Project

**18 April 2024**

# CGHE RoR Project Webinar series

- 16th April - Working-class Professional Service and Administrative Staff in UK Higher Education

- 18 April - CGHE Research on Research Project

- 23 April - Research Assessment and Impact

- 25 April - Open Science

- https://www.researchcghe.org/events/cghe-webinar-series/cghe-webinar-series-research-on-research-project/

# Meet the team…

**Project team:**

- Prof Alis Oancea (project lead, University of Oxford)
- Dr Gemma Derrick (University of Bristol, UK)
- Dr James Robson (University of Oxford, UK)
- Dr Xin Xu (University of Oxford, UK)
- Antonin Charret (University of Oxford, UK)
- Dr Jess Pilgrim-Brown (University of Oxford, UK)

- *Research assistants (University of Oxford, UK)*
- Lingxuan Chen
- Benjamin Hart
- Soyoung Lee
- McQueen Sum
- Szilvi Watson

- *Visiting researchers*
- Dr Maria-Rucsandra Stan, Italy
- Dr Hoonhui Cho, South Korea

- *Intern*
- Bruno Mallett

**Advisory group:**

- Prof Jonathan Boston (Vitoria University of Wellington, New Zealand)
- Dr Elizabeth Gadd (Loughborough University, UK)
- Dr Siri Brorstad Borlaug (NIFU, Norway)
- Dr Steven Hill (Research England)
- Prof Ka Ho Mok (Lingnan University, Hong Kong)
- Dr Phyllis Kalele (Academy of Science of South Africa)
- Prof Vincent Larivière (Université de Montréal, Canada)
- Prof Cameron Neylon (Curtin University, Australia)
- Prof Heidi Prozesky (Stellenbosch University, South Africa)
- Prof Emanuela Reale (Research Institute on Sustainable Economic Growth, Italy)
- Prof Leandro Rodriguez Medina (Universidad de las Americas Puebla, Mexico)

# Levels of analysis

**I. Systems**: research policy, governance, funding, production and sharing; spotlight on research(er) assessment

**II. Organisations**: role and value of academic research in HEIs, including strategy, cultures, management, practices (institutional case studies)

**III. People**: perspectives on the importance and recognition of research (academics across knowledge clusters, professionals, leadership, policy actors and publishers)

**IV. Further** research: [global] multi-module survey package development

CASES
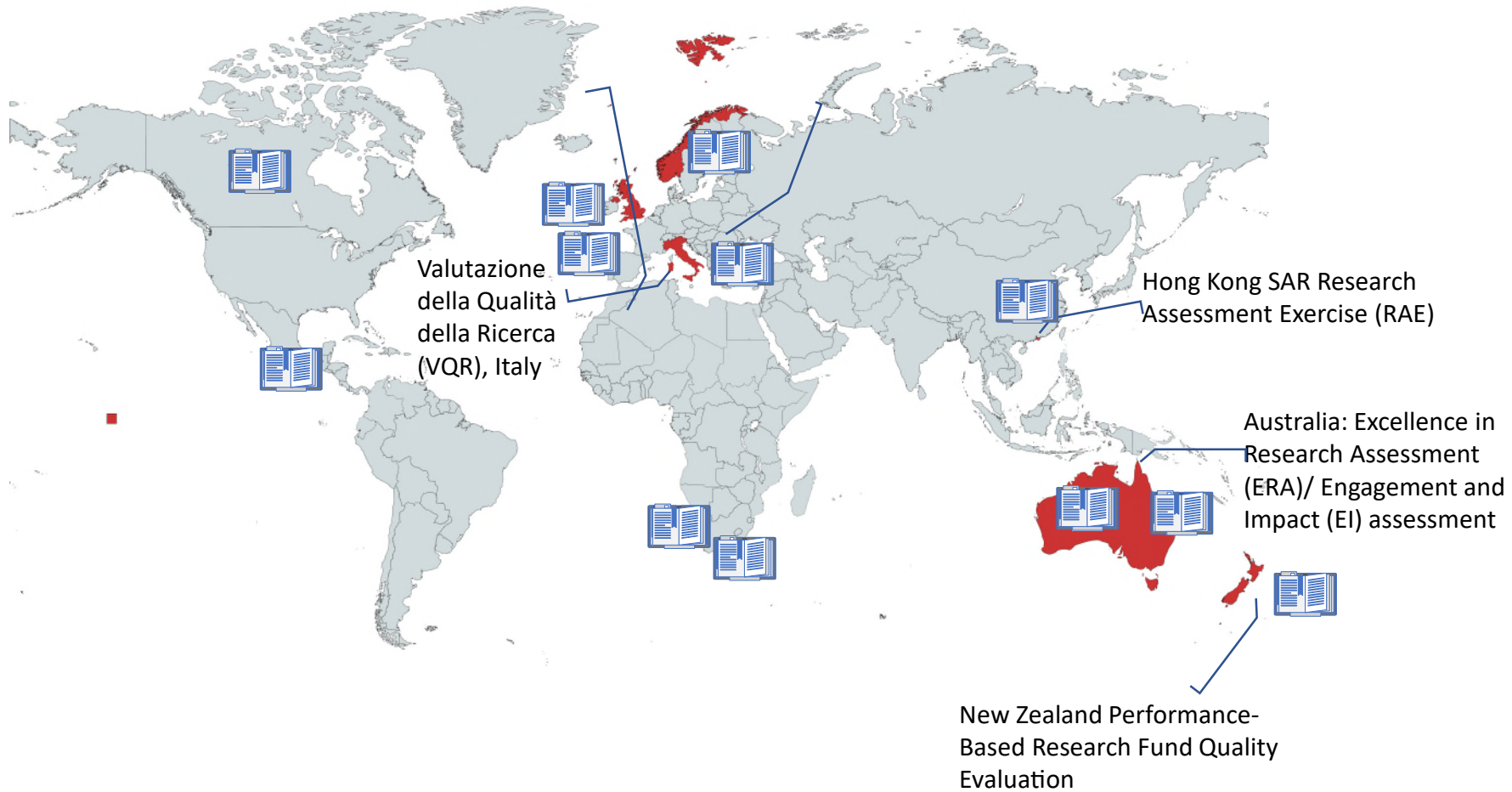
## Phase 1: Comparative mapping and analysis

- Policy analysis (308 policy documents)
- Interviews: 72 stakeholders in the 6 systems and internationally, from various sectors e.g. governments, funding bodies, research assessment agencies, unions, data and publishing industry, academies and learned societies, international organisations etc.

## Phase 2: Institutional case studies

- Interviews: 98 participants, including leadership, professionals, researchers, ECRs, from 4 different knowledge clusters and
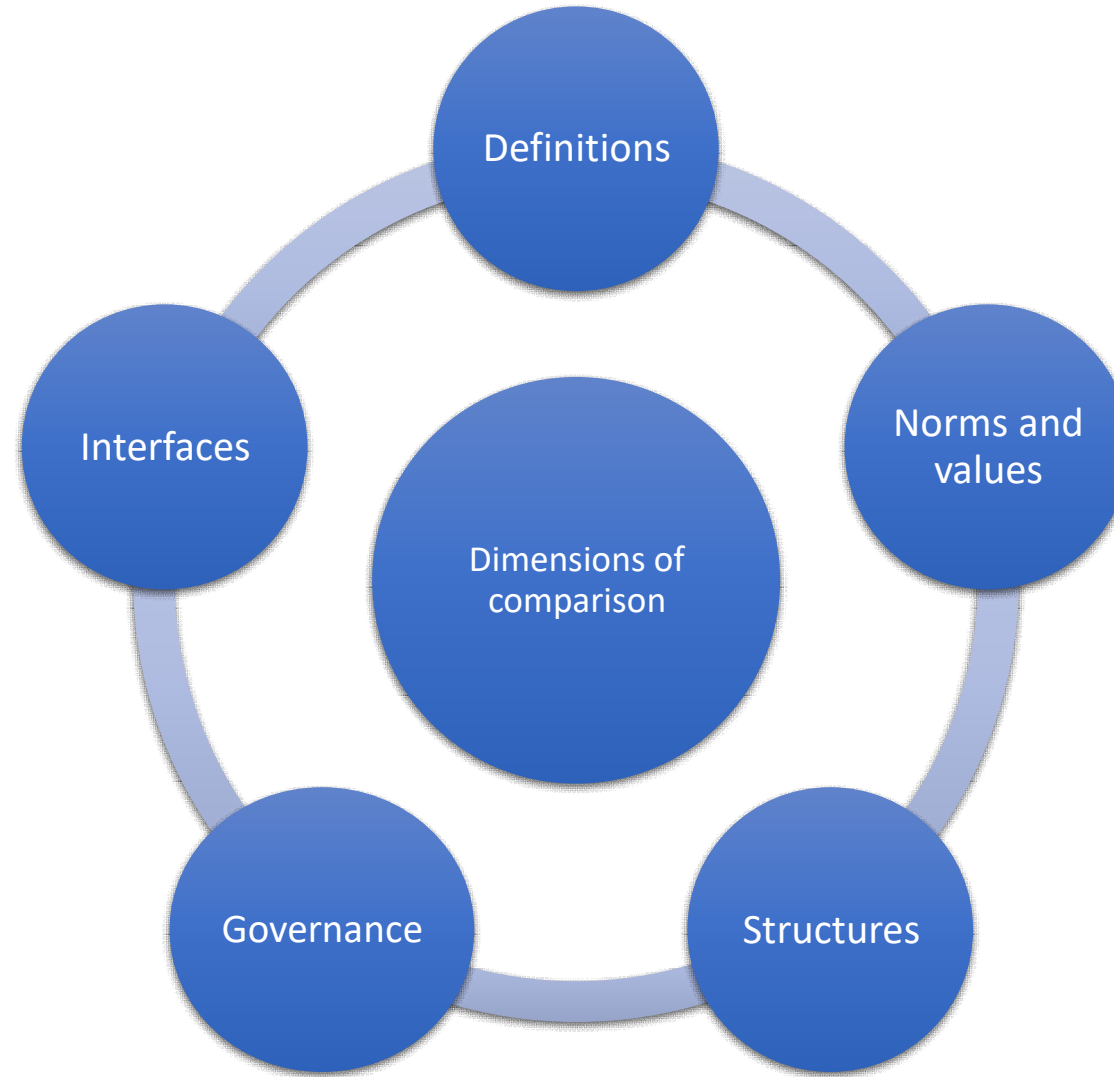- Bibliometric analysis at organisational and disciplinary/ field level

## Phase 3: Global survey and dialogues

# STUDY DESIGN

# Publications in progress

Recently published

- Comparative insights on international and global dynamics of research, including functions, roles and importance of research across contexts, systems, types of institution, and knowledge domains
- Conceptions of research and associated descriptive and normative terms
- Conceptualisations of researchers and research careers
- Research assessment (reform) in the context of different research governance models and policies
- Research and innovation ecosystems and research within the society
- Research cultures, practices and responsible research, including open science
- Research in times of crisis and uncertainty – COVID-19
- Methodological papers: global survey development, comparative approaches to RoR

HANDBOOK OF
Meta-Research

EE Elgar

Edited by
Alis Oancea • Gemma Derrick
Nuzha Nuseibeh • Xin Xu

Oancea, Xu, Charret, Pilgrim- Brown, Derrick, Robson et al (2024)

**Methodological challenges**

- Access, trust and confidentiality
- Equitable partnerships
- Vocabularies
- Volume and range of data
- De-centring (epistemic, cultural, practical)
- Historical and ongoing change

# Conceptualisations of *research*

| Types of definitions | Example interview quotes |
|---|---|
| **Descriptive/ lexical definition** | 'I define it very loosely, I define it as **a systematic way of collecting information** that is used within a known framework.' (New Zealand) |
| **Persuasive definition** | '**Humanity** is where it is today because we have **research as our superpower**.' (Australia) |
| **Operational definition** | 'We define research and innovation broadly, **we don't impose a definition on it** because we think it's for our partners and our institutions that we serve and funders to really understand what that is.' (England)<br><br>'The definition of a research in Italy is **up to the disciplinary community**; there is not a general definition.' (Italy) |
| **Stipulative definition** | 'I suppose we tend to just **fall back on the Frascati definition**. We tend to use a fairly broad definition **... in that anybody who's engaged in the process of doing research, so we would like to see it more than just academic researchers doing research**. ' (England)<br><br>'We use **the definition from the Frascati Manual**, I have it in front of me, we've just had the meetings...' (Norway) |
| **Ostensive definition** | 'Research is definitely, I think, **across all those broad areas, anything where we are trying to endeavour**... even in understanding **English literature**. Studying, I don't know, **Jane Austen**, in my view, can be just as important as understanding **quantum physics**.' (Australia)<br><br>'Research could mean **academic research or secret, private industrial research**. And it is not obvious that these different and legitimate modes of knowledge production have the same normative foundation.' (Norway) |

# Conceptualisations of *research*

**Examples**
**Drivers and Process**

e.g. 'Research, in my view, is having **a question or a curiosity**. We want to seek information to either answer that question or explore that curiosity, and in order to do that, you need to be able to **design a process** to be able to do that.' (Australia)

**Drivers of research**

- Curiosity, problems, challenges, etc.

**Outcomes of research**

- Original knowledge, advancement, betterment, impacts, application, etc.

**Processes of research**

- Systematic inquiry, discovery, investigation, behaviours, etc.

**Examples**
**Drivers, process, outcomes**

e.g. 'Research and development is **creative work undertaking systematically** to **achieve increased knowledge** including knowledge of humans, culture, and society, and also includes **the use of this knowledge to find new uses**.' (Norway)

- A lack of consensual definition of research from both interviews and policy documents

- Reflecting the heterogeneity of research, the diversity of research systems and stakeholders, and the nature of definitions as discourses

- 'Research' is a peculiar type of concept contains characteristics such as circularity, indexicality, performativity, ambiguity and contestation.

- The processes of defining research are actions of power and demonstrations of values, the results shape how research is understood and practised in different contexts and by different stakeholders.

# Literature

| Organisations and systems | Research Assessment | Disciplinary/Field identity | Inequalities and precarities |
|---|---|---|---|
| HR systems | Inclusion and exclusion criteria | Dominance of methods and skills in different fields and disciplines | Frameworks of assessment embedded in Global North traditions |
| Career development frameworks | Independence status | Paradigmatic schism | Marginalisation of indigenous methods and approaches outside of 'mainstream' science |
| Credit attribution schemes | Quality appraisal | Methodological identity | Workload and additional responsibilities |
| Formal definitions | Peer review | Methodological range | Intersection with demographic background and characteristics |

# 'Researchers' defined in policy

- Different and overlapping criteria across systems
- Evolvement, changes and development over time within each system (e.g. broadened categorisations, considerations of leaves and career breaks)
- Some core expectations remained stable

e.g. in New Zealand: *The individual is expected to make 'significant (2003) / substantive (2006/2012) / 'substantial and independent' (2018) contribution*

- Criteria for eligibility as 'researcher'

  - Contractual (%FTE, type of contract, duration, funding)
  - Employment function/ job title
  - Role responsibility/ job description (e.g. research active, significant research responsibility, publication productivity)
  - Independence
  - Substantive connection with the institution
  - Teaching and other requirements
  - Residence
  - Special cases - e.g. ECR, RA, emerging, staff in subsidiary companies etc; fractional staff; casual staff, visitors etc

# Diverse definitions of researchers

| Types of definitions | Examples in the data |
|---|---|
| **Normative** | Criteria set by research assessment framework, capacity to successfully apply for grants, research outputs, importance of topic, Teamwork and leadership qualities |
| **Contextual** | Related to specificities of a sector within or beyond academia; disciplinary dynamics; activities as research practitioners; local characteristics |
| **Characterized by research practice(s)** | Curiosity, Problem Solving, Rigour, Ethics, Passion, Risk taking, Creativity, Stubbornness/Perseverance |
| **Career related and contractual** | Status as a researchers; hierarchy between different types of researchers and issues of power within academia |

**CENTRE FOR GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION**

**Is everybody a researcher?** '*Everybody, lots of people do research (…) enquiring minds want to know.*' (Head of Unit, England)

What a researcher is ➜ what a researcher does (or should do): Research skills and practices

**Creativity**
'*Be creative, you know, not just go with the normal sort of themes every year, do an update of a paper from last year (…) try to find areas in which [a topic] can be applied, where they not necessarily have been applied, so see the possibilities*' (Head of Unit, Norway)

**Critical/Analytical skills**
'*Must go above and beyond the existing narrative and go back to the sources and go back to the data and (…) see something different in something that might have been in front of our eyes forever and we've never seen it in that way.*' (Head of Unit, England)

**Rigor**
'*Pick holes in existing research, understand how to be critical, and find those very, very niche gaps. Follow rigorous research methodologies. Not being afraid of criticism, and also not being afraid of it when it doesn't work. Admitting, I tried this, it did not work, but this is why it didn't work.*' (Researcher, England)

**Passion**:
'*I think fundamentally, it's about, to varying degrees, it's increasing human knowledge is what's driving them, understanding the world around them is what's driving them. I think that passion, that drive, that excitement is critical*' (Research Administrator, England)

# Diverse definitions of researchers

## Definitions reflecting research assessment exercises and frameworks:

**Outputs:** *'If you don't publish, there is no return of investment. So it's useless research'* (Researcher, England)

**Impact:** *'Research becomes quite meaningless and it doesn't have an impact on the lives of human beings. It just becomes an intellectual exercise that you do to satisfy yourself'* (Head of Unit, Hong Kong)

**Collaboration:** *'I don't think you can do good research without collaborating. You have to collaborate with other researchers by looking thoroughly into what they have published within your topic'* (Researcher, Norway)

## National, regional, local and disciplinary understandings:

e.g. *'In Norwegian (...) translated to English, researchers would be "Knowledge holders"* (Head of Unit, Norway)

**Medical Sciences**: *'there are a lot of people in the community that do excellent health research. so I have a very broad view of what a researcher is'*

**Philosophy**: *'We're pretty much independent agents. You don't rely on lab space, you don't rely on having a whole group of graduate students carrying out all the tedious work for you. It also means that you need to be self-motivated'*

## Career related, Contractual definitions, and hierarchies:

**'Professional' qualities and soft skills**: Leadership skills, Teamwork and team building capacities, Honesty, Respect

e.g. *'Good researchers build a team around them, that they enable the people in their team to be able to do their work well to be well supported'* (Researcher, Australia)

**Hierarchies and power dynamics:**
*'In the world of research hierarchies do exist, starting with that of prestige. Sometimes it becomes authority'* (Head of Unit, Italy)

Importance of Principal Investigators: *'A research is someone who can 'carry a research project to completion', generate the necessary funding, and disseminate the research in relevant outputs'* (Head of Unit, Australia)

**VS.**

On the opposite spectrum some participants considered some administrators and students as researchers

# Global survey: Aims and primary development

- A survey tool seeking to understand the experiences of being a researcher and conducting research in multiple different jurisdictions, countries and administrative contexts

- Formed from a concept matrix including evidence gathered from literature and information related to other existing survey tools

- Development process has included expert input from the wider RoR team

- Further development and pre-piloting through a series of cognitive interviews with the advisory board and more widely

| Theme | Sub-theme | Categorisation | Informal (attitudes and values) | Formal (structures and processes) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.PEOPLE | Demographics | Ethnicity<br>Gender<br>Sexuality<br>Disability<br>Age<br>Social class<br>Caring responsibilities | Networks<br>Intersectionality<br>Discrimination<br>Social justice<br>Capitals | Organisational/institutional/funder initiatives<br>Measurement metrics |
| 1.1 Identities | Identity as a researcher | Paradigm<br>Perspectives<br>Methods<br>Discipline/field | Research purpose<br>Research motivation<br>Research training (informal)<br>Professional identity | Formal research training |
| | Career stages | ECRs<br>Mid-Career<br>PGRs | Career opportunities<br>Development opportunities<br>Precarity of work<br>Instability | PGR-ECR lifecycle<br>Promotion structure<br>Progression opportunities<br>Contractual obligations |
| | Education & Background | Education & training<br>Professional training<br>Second career | Professional values<br>Ethical values | Career history<br>Education history<br>Cumulative histories |

Sample concept matrix for survey development

# Global survey: Thematic areas

Module themes focused on the following;

- People, careers and professional development

- Research cultures and institutional environments

- Engagement, knowledge exchange and innovation

- Research assessment

- Professional Research staff/Professional services staff

# Global survey: Cognitive interviewing

- Pre-piloting phase of global survey development. To date cognitive interviews n=5, each at around an hour in length
- Focused on the practice of verbalising the thought process in approaching each question
- Intention to understand phrasing, positioning and clarity of questions and function of the survey tool
- With a range of academics from different disciplines/fields and administrative contexts and jurisdictions

# Global survey: Complications within comparative research

- Terminology in research across contexts and jurisdictions
- Professional staff, their titles, roles and responsibilities
- Disciplines, fields and subject identity
- Demographic characteristics and categorisation (with specific emphasis on race and ethnicity and social class status).

# Thank you and please keep in touch…

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https://www.researchcghe.org/research/2020-2023/project/research-on-research-the-research-function-and-mission-of-higher-education/

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