

One University Thinking with Laura Breen

(Research Adjacent Episode 81)

Laura is prioritising collaboration over competition to develop impactful research projects

<https://researchadjacent.com/laura-breen-episode-81/>



[00:00:01] **Laura Breen:** We've been pairing academics with people within the community. And I did the pairing for that and quite a lot of come back and said, how? How did you do that? Like we really hit it off and I was like, I don't really know, but it must be that kind of intuition.

[00:00:15] **Laura Breen:** I hate the fact that everything becomes a competition between universities, especially around public engagement and anything that becomes a hot topic for REF or wherever suddenly you find yourself competing.

[00:00:26] **Laura Breen:** A very senior leader said the other day that one of the governance groups that I coordinate said was the best example of one university thinking that I've seen.

[00:00:35] **Sarah McLusky:** Hello there. I'm Sarah McLusky and this is Research Adjacent.

[00:00:42] **Sarah McLusky:** Each episode I talk to amazing research adjacent professionals about what they do and why it makes a difference. Keep listening to find out why we think the research adjacent space is where the real magic happens.

[00:00:58] **Sarah McLusky:** Hello and welcome along to episode 81, where I am joined by guest Laura Breen. Laura is research development and impact manager at the University of Manchester. Her role is a cross University one. She helps to bring together interdisciplinary teams, connects researchers with community partners, and prioritizes collaboration over competition an approach, which has been described by senior leaders as one university thinking.

[00:01:23] **Sarah McLusky:** Laura found her way to this work via the museums sector and a PhD in ceramics where she wrestled with what impact might look like for the arts. Now, working across disciplines, she still believes in convening what she calls creative relational spaces and leads with empathy and intuition.

[00:01:40] **Sarah McLusky:** We talk about creating culture change, why big challenges need multi-partner interdisciplinary teams and giving relationships time to grow. If you're listening to this soon after its release, you'll have a chance to meet Laura in person at the Impact Ignite Conference in Southampton next week, where she will be talking about supporting participatory research.

[00:01:59] **Sarah McLusky:** I'm gonna be there too, recording a live podcast interview that will be broadcast in early 2026. So if you're going, make sure that you come along and say hello to both me and Laura. But for now, let's listen on to hear Laura's story.

[00:02:12] **Sarah McLusky:** Welcome along to the podcast, Laura. It is absolutely brilliant to meet you and to hear all about your story today.

[00:02:21] **Sarah McLusky:** So I wonder if we could begin just by giving the listeners a little bit of an introduction to you, who you are and what you do.

[00:02:28] **Laura Breen:** Yeah. Thanks. It was lovely to meet you finally. I feel like I know you through all these podcasts and all the other people that we've got in common. So yeah, at the moment I'm the research development and impact manager in the central research strategy team at the University of Manchester.

[00:02:40] **Laura Breen:** Kind of before that, I've got a background in having worked in impact. I think this is my fourth institution. Different levels. Different roles in impact, and a research and practice background in museums, and worked in project management and kind of as a magazine editor and things like that in between.

[00:02:58] **Laura Breen:** So lots of things going on.

[00:03:00] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah, really varied background. I'm looking forward to digging into all of that. I think I said before we came on the call, I've been reading through your profile and I was like, oh, that's very not necessarily unusual background, but just really varied and interesting.

[00:03:13] **Sarah McLusky:** So yeah, definitely hear about that. But let's talk a little bit, first of all, about the job that you do. So research development and impact. Yeah. Having those two things together seems quite unusual from my experience.

[00:03:25] **Laura Breen:** Yeah, I think it is. I think and I came across it, I, how's that gonna work? But I think, as I thought about it and as the job evolved, it became really obvious in that there's this focus on challenge based research coming through, and a lot of that is about both impact and research development. So how you weave those things together, how you convene teams

from different disciplines around bids, but are thinking about kind of the impact of that, but how that's written into the bid.

[00:03:52] **Laura Breen:** The same with co-production and things like that. So I think for university of this scale. Because we, I think we're one of the five largest universities in the country or something. So I think for that, it really does make sense for those things to be woven together because you've got the faculty based teams working on those things, in detail.

[00:04:11] **Laura Breen:** But you need somebody to join it up and say we've got, a bid going forward in this focus area. How do we convene teams from science and engineering and somebody from humanities that might know about that? And how do we bring health in and how do we bring in cultural institutions, you know, the comms team, how do we convene all those people to do this work in a way that really answers societal challenges? So yeah, I think it's the scale of the university and thinking about it from that perspective really does bring them together and make sense when you're doing the job. I think

[00:04:38] **Sarah McLusky:** It, it does make sense actually.

[00:04:40] **Sarah McLusky:** I think saying it's unusual to me, it makes a lot of sense, 'cause as you say, it's about having that strategy. It's about having that sense of everything from the original concept of the research through to the difference that you want it to make in the world. So actually joining those two things up together makes a lot of sense to me.

[00:04:58] **Sarah McLusky:** It's just that not many other universities are doing it that way. I think that's.

[00:05:03] **Laura Breen:** But know, yeah. When I saw the job, I was like, what is that gonna involve? Can I do this? Like, why is this And it, yeah. And then it does entirely make sense when once you're in the thick of it, it's oh, of course it's an ecosystem. It makes perfect sense to bring these things together.

[00:05:17] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. But that's a big job though, if you've So have, you've got oversight of that for the whole university.

[00:05:22] **Laura Breen:** Yeah, but we have , i'm in a team where we've got research culture other bits of research policy. My manager's, the research strategy manager, so we all work together quite closely on different aspects of those.

[00:05:33] **Laura Breen:** And then we've got managers in each faculty who are doing, overseeing the team, so they do the line management. They do a lot of the kind of stuff on the ground down doing the, how do we do this as a joint process? How do we make sure we're not replicating things across different teams? How do we not have three different processes of this and have one

[00:05:50] **Sarah McLusky:** yes.

[00:05:51] **Laura Breen:** Make sure we're bringing in all the right people.

[00:05:52] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. Yeah. So I imagine that evolves on a day-to-day basis. Lots of meetings. Yeah. Lots of just coordinating, emailing, joining things up.

[00:06:01] **Laura Breen:** Yeah. I think that my manager, again, she's described me like you are glue.

[00:06:05] **Laura Breen:** It's it's thinking about who should be in the room for this? Who are we missing? Who are we forgetting? Who should have been brought into this beginning? So it's building those relationships really across all different bits of the university. So. And knowing who should be there in that project.

[00:06:18] **Laura Breen:** Yeah. Having that awareness.

[00:06:20] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. No, it's fantastic that you're, as I say, thinking about it at that top level scale. So you are, you've said there that your background coming to this point then maybe let tell us a bit about your story of how you, you came to where you are now and then I'll ask the question I was gonna ask.

[00:06:39] **Laura Breen:** Yeah. I came into kind of the world of impact as it is when I was finishing my PhD at the University of Westminster. So that was on kind of ceramics slash museology. So I was working with three contemporary ceramics practitioners in three museums. And looking at kind of the evolution of ceramic practice and how it moved from object to project and some of that even brought in REF even then.

[00:07:02] **Laura Breen:** So as I was writing this up, I was like, the impact agenda is shaping what people are producing because people are used to making objects, have suddenly got to talk about the impact of their work. So it's actually shaping artistic practice at the time. And then the impact was obviously arrived in the REF.

[00:07:19] **Laura Breen:** The team at the university looked at me and said, you know about this, your background's in museums. I'd worked in museums for kind of seven, eight years beforehand. You are used to reporting to the Arts Council, used to talking about the impact of these things. Can you help us to deal with this thing? And we learned what impact in REF was together and navigated it. Through that. Got through that REF and went from there really.

[00:07:40] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. I think it's one thing that's really interesting that I found from, so a lot of my career I worked in the sciences and then I came into a job where I was working with arts and humanities and the way that the different disciplines conceive of impact and participatory research and things like that, I think is really interesting. And from what I've seen And it sounds like maybe from your experience as well, the arts and humanities are almost doing this stuff already. It's baked into just the practice of doing the arts and humanities stuff, and so there's a lot that the sciences can learn from that, which sounds like exactly what happened to you.

[00:08:20] **Laura Breen:** Yeah, I think it is baked in it, it's almost, it's more complicated as well because it is so threaded through everything. When you're trying to evidence things in that kind of quite linear, REF way, it's it's through our processes. It's not just one impact. It's all these little things that going off it's impact on artistic practices.

[00:08:36] **Laura Breen:** So things like that come up. And like I said, the fact that it does shape artistic practice is potentially problematic in some ways. Are you producing what you would produce as an artist, or are you working in this way so that you can save for REF? I've worked with a museum that has seen an explosion of projects, reinterpreting museums by people that might not have worked in that way before.

[00:08:58] **Laura Breen:** I think there's that, but I think yeah, definitely that way of reporting, that way of thinking about audiences was, is, was more baked into a lot of that stuff.

[00:09:07] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. Yeah. Definitely. And that, so it makes sense why people look to you to help tell that story of impact. Yeah. What you said there about when it changes artistic practice that has been I've seen that come up so many times in science and art collaboration projects where you're sometimes what the scientists want or they think they want. Yeah. Is a kind of, almost like a literal interpretation of the science.

[00:09:33] **Laura Breen:** Yeah. Pretty much. Yeah.

[00:09:34] **Sarah McLusky:** Whereas what the artist wants is to create their artistic vision inspired by the science. Yeah. And sometimes that sense that what the scientists want is almost like some pretty picture that they can put up in the foyer of the lab. And that's not the way the artist would approach it.

[00:09:54] **Laura Breen:** Yeah, and that starting with the end point, which again is common to the way we work in impact quite often is like, where do you want to be? Quite often it's, you learn this through the exploration, you learn this through the people you're working with.

[00:10:06] **Laura Breen:** It shifts as it goes along, and that's a kind of different thing to wrap your head around as well, I think.

[00:10:10] **Sarah McLusky:** Oh, it is a different thing to wrap your head around. There's some funding applications I've been involved in helping with recently where it, once you start to get the co-production and the participatory research into it, it's very difficult to say what the end point's gonna be.

[00:10:24] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. You can see what the process is gonna be, but you can't really see what the end point's going to be. Yeah. Yeah. Oh, so you got into impact that way. And then you said you, you went through a few different organizations working in impact type roles. So is drawing in the research development side of things then, is that new for you in this role you're in now?

[00:10:45] **Laura Breen:** Kind of, but I think I always, when I was doing my PhD, I was always working on research funding applications with the team. When I worked in museums, I was working with funding teams. As I said, it was like a magazine editor at one point, so I'm used to writing narrative and crafting a story. So that was always there as well.

[00:11:04] **Laura Breen:** And I always worked on bids with the research development teams throughout. At my last institution I basically wrote a lot of the public engagement bids with the academics. I wrote the impact sections at most of the institutions I've worked with. So like I worked really closely with them on that.

[00:11:18] **Laura Breen:** So it wasn't, I always did the costings, did the reading of the guidance, the, like that side of things. Yeah. Yeah. I was always been involved in teams convening people around these things, so

[00:11:29] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. So just the first time having it in your job description, maybe. And then is it the and is it the strategic part of it as well, I guess the kind of horizon scanning and that sort of thing?

[00:11:39] **Laura Breen:** Yeah, very much that. And again, I think that's something I've always done. It's always been the way that my mind has worked is what's going on in the sector? What should we be thinking about three years down the line?

[00:11:48] **Laura Breen:** How is that gonna inform what we're doing now? But yeah there's more space for that because I'm not line managing because the teams and the faculties are doing a lot of that. Then it's right who can sit back and look at the way we are doing things and how we can improve them 'cause they haven't got the space to necessarily do that, and it's

[00:12:04] **Sarah McLusky:** Yes.

[00:12:04] **Laura Breen:** And they've not got that overview.

[00:12:06] **Sarah McLusky:** Yes. Yeah. When they're in the weeds day to day, getting all the, yeah. The paperwork and the costings and everything like that together,

[00:12:12] **Laura Breen:** more specific to their funders. So yeah, you get to know your specific funders, but when it's cross council or interdisciplinary, it's a different thing so. Yeah.

[00:12:21] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. But that very much, that space, that I think is where a lot of the most exciting things are happening, isn't it? These interdisciplinary spaces. Are there any particular, I guess there's some things you maybe can't talk about if they're in the process, but are there any particular bids that you've helped pull together that you can tell us about that you're proud of, that work came together really well?

[00:12:45] **Laura Breen:** Not really I know I tend to sit apart from that. Our teams have done some amazing bids like this. So the joined up Center for Sustainable Transformations, I think it's called, so it's about the transition to net zero, but making that inclusive and the humanities team worked on that, but with the Young Foundation, with people from quite different disciplinary areas with the local authorities, they'll be working with people out in communities to really co-produce this work. So that was, that's a really nice one, which I've not had much to do with myself, but it's kind of part of that way of working, which is a.

[00:13:20] **Sarah McLusky:** It is these kind of interdisciplinary ones, bringing lots of different people together and I feel like that's, it feels to me like the way forwards, but not not necessarily everybody's on board.

[00:13:30] **Laura Breen:** Yeah. Not for everything. Yeah.

[00:13:32] **Sarah McLusky:** And not for everything. Exactly there's certainly some parts of research. And is that something you ever get a bit of pushback on? People saying, oh, that just doesn't work for the community, research or, yeah.

[00:13:46] **Laura Breen:** So we've got a lot of people doing fundamental research, blue skies research at the university, and that's always been one of our strengths. So we are really clear that not everything we have to do has to be challenge based. This is also an area of strength. But think about it, think about the impact, think about how it's, where it might go.

[00:14:04] **Laura Breen:** So it's the thinking about it, it's the not, we're gonna push you all down that route because. That's not right either. Some of our biggest discoveries have come through that fundamental research

[00:14:12] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah, because sometimes you're just fiddling around with stuff and then you never know where it's gonna end up. Thinking about maybe then just your career more broadly, the sorts of things you do now. Are there any projects or things you're involved with that really stand out as things that you're really proud of?

[00:14:30] **Laura Breen:** I think it's been culture shifts. So after working at Westminster, I did a bit of work there as a research associate working on impact. But then I moved to the University of Huddersfield where I was based in the school of arts, humanities media and arts humanities, media, music, humanities, and media.

[00:14:50] **Laura Breen:** And they'd just created that role 'cause they saw the value of impact. So it was the only role in the university that dealt with impact. There was a kind of a central role that was overseeing things. But in terms of the culture change, there was that role. I think in terms of that, I had to work a lot with senior management 'cause I was the only role, even though I was faculty based, I was working with the senior leaders to push for change in areas like that so,

[00:15:12] **Sarah McLusky:** mm-hmm.

[00:15:12] **Laura Breen:** we were kind of making friends across the university. We had a, what we called like PE Club. It's just a few of us are interested in public engagement in the basement. We brought together some people to talk about this showing the university it mattered, and then they went for the Engage Watermark.

[00:15:24] **Laura Breen:** Or they saw when they decided to review the the REF impact case study draft, they saw that it was working in our faculty and then other faculty started creating roles. So I think seeing that kind of thing come through and then I worked at Manchester Met in a faculty based impact management role.

[00:15:40] **Laura Breen:** And again, there it was. I think sometimes seeing some of the people that were most resistant at the start when I left with the people that seemed to be saddest about me leaving. So I thought, okay, this is, you really didn't wanna work with me at the beginning. You're sad that I'm going, I must have done something right there.

[00:15:55] **Laura Breen:** And people, especially like the early career researchers I'm working with, seeing them become more confident, seeing some of the bids that we work with come through and watch, watching their careers grow. So it's that kind of culture change. And I think, yeah, where I am now, similarly 'cause I'm joining up people from across the university, I've had a few people come to me and say I feel seen.

[00:16:16] **Laura Breen:** Like I don't feel that my area of research was seen before, like somebody I've been working with. She said, oh, I just went off and wrote a load of stuff the other day. She said, I've not been able to do it. But working with you has given me that kind of freedom and kind of head space to do it. And then a very senior leader said the other day that like one of the governance groups that I coordinate said was like the best example of like one university thinking that I've seen.

[00:16:39] **Laura Breen:** I thought this is, that's the achievement. So it's not like I won a massive bid, but in terms of culture change, it seems to be that kind of coworking. So it's more that kind of thing I think.

[00:16:49] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. But that is when it comes to it and that, that's one of the challenges, isn't it, in this kind of work, is actually in the grand scheme of things. That's the stuff that makes more of a difference, isn't it? Yeah. Is actually, if you can change somebody's thinking that's more important than winning some big bid or running some event or something that you can point to and say, I did that and it is this challenge, isn't it, with the way that we value and assess research. It's all about these kind of tick box outputs.

[00:17:21] **Laura Breen:** Yeah. It's what's your KPI for that? Yeah. So what have we done that's worked this year? And it's I could tell you about all these things, but trying to

[00:17:29] **Sarah McLusky:** actually put numbers or statistics or Yeah, even anecdotes around it sometimes is really challenging, isn't it? But really powerful. So what do you think is the secret then, to making these kind of culture shifts?

[00:17:44] **Laura Breen:** Listening I think, caring. I think sometimes it's that you care about what you do. Listening to people and that join up, I think not trying to own everything you can see something that you can't help with but somebody else can.

[00:18:00] **Laura Breen:** Being able to let go of things and go, actually, no, I can't help you with that, but why don't you go and work with the policy team? Why don't you go and work with them? I think that kind of openness to different ways of thinking different with different expertise, I think. But it's very relational.

[00:18:15] **Laura Breen:** It's about the people and I think my friends said to me find your people and it's I found my people. And then through those networks, they've got other networks and that seems to create the, I dunno, the force to make things happen.

[00:18:26] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. Oh it is, there's certainly with all the people I've spoken to on the podcast, different people have different approaches to making things happen, but it sounds like you've got that kind of quiet, relational, diplomatic yeah, way of influencing people, which can be incredibly powerful, but also unrecognized sometimes. Yeah. Sometimes just not, the time and the care that has to go into that sort of approach is sometimes not recognized. Yeah.

[00:18:57] **Laura Breen:** Yeah. Yeah. And it's the, it's tiring as well, isn't it, when you care so much. I think somebody said to me the other day is you have to not care so much. I was like, I can't. It's in my DNA. It's like I'd love if I didn't care, but then also I wouldn't be me and things wouldn't work in the same way.

[00:19:12] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. I think maybe that's what we, sometimes I feel like a little bit of that is what's lacking.

[00:19:18] **Sarah McLusky:** I just said, we did an interview when with I'll mispronounce her name, Johanna Stadlbauer,

[00:19:26] **Laura Breen:** Oh, she's amazing.

[00:19:27] **Sarah McLusky:** Yes. And she was talking about how we need just academia to be a bit more kind.

[00:19:31] **Laura Breen:** Yes. lately

[00:19:34] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. It's so adversarial sometimes, and some in some sectors. And and particularly with the, the financial challenges and things like that. At the moment the last thing we need to be is. Fighting against each other. It's better. Yeah. Fight together.

[00:19:48] **Laura Breen:** Yeah. I think it's that protecting yourself as well, isn't it? So care, but also realize that what you can and can't take on is what I've learned over recent years. It w on't be good for me or anyone if I keep taking on.

[00:20:01] **Sarah McLusky:** So no, true boundaries. Yeah. Incredibly important. That sounds like we're, it sounds like we're coming now to talk maybe about some of the things that have been a

little bit challenging. So have boundaries been something that's been a bit challenging for you at times?

[00:20:13] **Laura Breen:** Yeah, I think so. I think it's interesting. Yeah, I think there's probably two things challenge wise that really stick out. So I think universities, they are strange places, aren't they? 'cause they're very strange places. You can have decades of experience in your area, but then have to win the agreement of, or defer to people that have got extensive academic experience, but maybe not in your area.

[00:20:35] **Laura Breen:** And they're not usually the most senior. I find, like I've got really good relationships with our senior people who respect that. But there can be other people that don't. So that could be frustrating because you can see it holding things back, or you can see things don't work as well as they can, or they could do, or you can see that two years down the line, you're doing what you suggested two years ago. Yeah. Was needed. So I think that it can be yeah, living with that and learning to live with the fact that you can't control everything. I think, especially in a centralized role like me, I was like, that's not working, that's not working. It's what can you feasibly do? You can steer, you can guide, but you can't go in and fix everything yourself. So I think, yeah, that bit.

[00:21:13] **Laura Breen:** I think the second one would be value clashes. So again, over the past few years I've probably learned that, probably forever, I'm really driven by my values and behaviors. I think when I've been in job interviews, I remember someone saying to me that was an academic answer. When you're talking about the reasons that we do things, I'm not thinking maybe in terms of how a lot of professional services people in think why should we bring in income? Why should we do all these things? And I default to well it's our public duty, you gotta make the world a better place. They're like, oh, this is interesting. And I think my current manager actually said to me, manager, that was a very ethical answer. So it's so that comes through a lot and I think, yeah, I've also been called like a canary in the coal mine is something someone said.

[00:21:56] **Laura Breen:** I'm very sensitive to what's going on. So if there are microaggressions and that kind of, I was reading an article about it the other day about incivility, that kind of subtle level of unkindness. I'm, I can't, I can't work within that I found myself having to, trying to change those situations first of all, but then having to admit when I'm not gonna change that is bigger than me to, to move course, I think it's. Understanding that, and I'm thinking yeah I can't fix this. No, this is bigger than me. So understanding those things, which, I'm lucky. I've got a very nice team now. I've worked with many wonderful teams. But I think it's learning about yourself, isn't it? What are your lines in the sand? What's.

[00:22:38] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. I think the older I get, the more I realize that our careers and, it's all just a huge long process of self discovery. Yeah. Isn't it? It's about learning, what you're good at, what you're not so good at, what you can tolerate, what you can't tolerate, where your boundaries are, where's the line that, that, if that's crossed,

[00:22:58] **Laura Breen:** yeah.

[00:22:58] **Sarah McLusky:** It's not gonna be good for anybody. Yeah.

[00:23:01] **Laura Breen:** Yeah. I am. Yeah. I think, okay. My manager said when I came in the room she said, oh we've got an empath, but in a nice way. She's we've got an empath. And I was like, really? How have you got that from me in a few weeks?

[00:23:11] **Laura Breen:** But I think, yeah, I probably am more sensitive to some of these things than other people, but usually it plays out a bit down the line when things start falling apart. It's oh yeah. Yes it's spotting those things, but yeah, knowing, again, boundaries. Boundaries, very important.

[00:23:25] **Sarah McLusky:** It sounds like as well as being empathetic, you're also very intuitive as well, so like you say, maybe recognizing almost like that gut feeling of this is the way things are going, which I can see is useful both from the relational point of view, but also that kind of horizon scanning, for your job. Like intuition about which people will work well together. Yeah. Or which projects are gonna be like a good fit. Which ones are gonna be the, where's the world going, where's that gonna be?

[00:23:56] **Laura Breen:** Yeah. That does happen. Like we pair, we had a lovely project the other week where we were pairing, we've been pairing, academics with kind of people we've got relationships within the community. Working with a social responsibility team, just sending 'em out and they've gone for three brews together.

[00:24:10] **Laura Breen:** I gone for, three chats together. Just get to know each other and see what learning there is and if there's learning from the university about that. And I did the pairing for that kind knowing things about them, speaking to people who knew them, reading about their backgrounds and quite a lot of come back and said, how?

[00:24:25] **Laura Breen:** How did you do that? Like we really hit it off and I was like, I don't really know, but it must be that kind of intuition about Yeah, there's very impact mindset, isn't it? I think it's, I know like I'm an art historian, I guess cultural historian by background and it's that picking up evidence, piecing things together it's, I think it comes with that as well.

[00:24:45] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah, potentially. I think it's, I think as well, I wonder if it's with the arts background that often in the arts, it's about intangible stuff, isn't it? Yeah. It's about how does this art affect how you feel? Yes. Or that sort of thing, or the story that it's trying to tell. Not in a literal sense, yeah. But in that more kind of sensory intuitive kind of way.

[00:25:09] **Laura Breen:** Probably with museums as well, I think, 'cause museum audiences are, you can break them down, but they're potentially everyone. So you've got to think about what's gonna appeal to this person? How are they gonna learn? Are they gonna learn anything about history? Do we care? Or are they gonna learn from their granddad, talking to 'em about their past as they go around? So I think it's some of that as well.

[00:25:26] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. And just recognizing that different people are different and need different things and different levels of support and all that sort of stuff. Yeah. Oh, really interesting. I love thinking about this stuff. And so I think, as I like to ask my guests if they had a magic wand, what would they change about the world that they work in? What would you like to use your magic wand for?

[00:25:46] **Laura Breen:** Blimey so you, yeah, you mentioned the adversarial stuff. So that would be one.

[00:25:49] **Laura Breen:** I hate the fact that everything becomes a competition between universities and things like that, especially around kind public engagement and anything that becomes a hot topic for REF or wherever suddenly you find yourself competing. But I think for me it's, it is a relational space, so I think it would be more funding, more time, more support for the stages, either side of the research. So create time and space to co-create research

questions, but also to sit in that space and get to know different groups, different individuals that we might do research with. Find those commonalities without it being transactional.

[00:26:24] **Laura Breen:** On, same on the other side, time to maintain those relationships and evolve them without just thinking about the next funding bid or the project. So I think of it as like creating space for what you might have water cooler moments, if you were at a conference, if you worked in an office together, which you don't get with these kind of groups, but something like that kind of bring you together and that creative relational spaces.

[00:26:46] **Laura Breen:** And not everything have to be in transactional because. I've seen that these seem to be the places that are actually most productive. But again, you can't put a price on them. You can't say no can, because this will lead to this. But quite often they do.

[00:26:59] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. Yeah. No, and it is it, and it's, I agree, it's so valuable, but because it's slow. Time consuming and there isn't always a clear, definite outcome for it, it can feel hard to prioritize. Yeah. But I've seen that. Yeah. When people do prioritize it, it moves mountains. Yeah. Just getting to know people on a level as people can just be just just like you say about people feeling seen and understood.

[00:27:34] **Laura Breen:** And build that trust and the things that come up when you've not got an agenda and you find some commonality that you haven't even thought about. So yeah, you can never plan for that. If you've got a really strict agenda, it's, you're not gonna find those things out.

[00:27:46] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah, absolutely. You need that space and time to talk about things. And it's one of the challenges now, isn't it, with things being online. There are huge benefits, obviously. Yeah. With things being online, but I think we lose that space for casual conversation, don't we? Yeah. Yeah. Oh, I think we're moving. I dunno, things are moving and changing, aren't they? All the time. But I think people are starting to realize the downsides of living online.

[00:28:14] **Laura Breen:** Yeah. And I think there's slightly more space for that kind of test and fail thing. Like we're trying to do bits of it, but people seem to be moving a bit more. It's hard in this financial climate, but, allowing a bit of space for risk in kind of what happens if you have those failed spaces. It's,

[00:28:34] **Sarah McLusky:** yeah. Yeah. No, really such, again, a kind thing to do for people if you can create those spaces. Yeah. Oh, lovely. We should think about wrapping up our conversation. Yeah. Yeah. And and I think that idea of making things a little bit kinder is a lovely place, A little bit kinder, a little bit slower, is a lovely place to leave it.

[00:28:55] **Sarah McLusky:** And if people want to get in touch with you, find out more about what you do, where is the best place to find you?

[00:29:01] **Laura Breen:** Usually on LinkedIn, I think is, it's the easiest place to, to find me otherwise on the research strategy pages at the, on the university website. It's linked to me there as well.

[00:29:10] **Sarah McLusky:** Excellent. We'll get links to those and put them in the show notes. Definitely. Yeah. The LinkedIn is where we connected and you're certainly very active there, so good place to come and see what you're up to. Oh, thank you so much for taking the time to come along and share your story and, it's been so interesting. Thank you.

[00:29:27] **Laura Breen:** Lovely to meet you.

[00:29:31] **Sarah McLusky:** Thanks for listening to Research Adjacent. If you're listening in a podcast app, please check you're subscribed and then use the links in the episode description to find full show notes and to follow the podcast on LinkedIn or Instagram. You can also find all the links and other episodes at www.researchadjacent.com.

[00:29:48] **Sarah McLusky:** Research Adjacent is presented and produced by Sarah McLusky, and the theme music is by Lemon Music Studios on Pixabay. And you, yes you, get a big gold star for listening right to the end. See you next time.