

# We're all here for the research with the Research Professional Futures team

## (Research Adjacent Episode 95)

Project leads Lorna Wilson, Steph Bales, Isabella von Holstein and Rika Nair on realising the full potential of the research professional workforce

<https://researchadjacent.com/research-professional-futures-episode-95/>



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**Sarah McLusky:** Hello there. I'm Sarah McLusky, and this is Research Adjacent.

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 [00:01:00] think the research adjacent space is where the real magic happens.

Hello and welcome to Research Adjacent. Today, I'm gonna invite you behind the scenes of Research Professional Futures with project leads Lorna Wilson, Steph Bales, Rika Nair, and Isabella von Holstein. I don't think it's an understatement to say that Research Professional Futures marks a turning point in the recognition of research-adjacent professionals and the value that they bring.

As you'll hear, the program is all about understanding, recognizing, and supporting all kinds of research professionals. The project will cover everything from the basics, like just knowing the data of how many of us there are out there, to creating professional development frameworks, and from trialing projects to embedding change.

My guests are something of a dream team in this department, with a deep understanding of the world of research professionals. Lorna Wilson is the managing director of Research and Innovation Services at Durham University. She is also the chair of ARMA and a previous guest on this podcast. [00:02:00] Steph Bales is director of Research and Enterprise at Teesside University, soon to take up a role at Sterling University, and Steph is also a former chair of ARMA.

Isabella von Holstein is senior project manager at King's College London and leads the PRISM Network, which you can hear all about from the founder, Anya Roeding, in episode 18. And last, but by no means least, is Rika Nair, who is the research culture manager at the University of Warwick, and Rika also leads the Research Culture Enablers Network, and Rika features in a previous episode as well, episode 77.

In our conversation, you'll hear all about how the project came about, why it's needed, what they hope it will achieve, and why it is truly groundbreaking for all sorts of different reasons. Listen on to hear all about Research Professional Futures.

Welcome along to the podcast.

I think this is the most guests I've ever had on all in one Zoom room, so let's see how it goes. We have got the team today with us [00:03:00] from the Research Professional Futures programme, who are gonna be telling us all about what that programme involves, and it's really exciting project for anybody who is research adjacent who is listening.

So with us in the room today, we've got Rika Nair, we've got Lorna Wilson, we've got Steph Bales, and we've got Isabella Von Holstein. I'm gonna ask each of you to introduce yourselves and tell us a little bit about what you do in your day job, and then a little bit about what you're doing with the project, and we'll find out more about the project in due course.

So Lorna, I'm gonna come to you first.

**Lorna Wilson:** Thanks, Sarah, and thank you so much for having us on. I'm Lorna Wilson. I'm Managing Director of Research and Innovation Services at Durham University, and I'm also chair of the Association of Research Managers and Administrators, ARMA UK. And I'm one of the co-leads of the RPF project.

I lead work package one.

**Sarah McLusky:** Fantastic. Thanks, Lorna. We shall hear more about work package one in due course. Steph, could you introduce yourself?

**Steph Bales:** Hi, I'm Steph Bales. I'm Director of Research and [00:04:00] Enterprise at Teesside University. I've quite a broad role developing research and knowledge exchange strategy and making sure that I deliver professional services across research and innovation, knowledge exchange and commercialization, business, civic and public engagement, and student and graduate enterprise.

On the RPF, I am co-lead for work package two, which is focused on developing a comprehensive professional development framework and interactive digital platform, and I'll expand on that later.

**Sarah McLusky:** Okay, thanks very much, Steph.

Isabella.

**Isabella von Holstein:** So I'm Isabella von Holstein. I'm a senior project manager at King's College London, and I lead the third work package. I also lead the PRISM network for the last three and a half years.

**Sarah McLusky:** Fantastic. For anybody who doesn't know what PRISM stands for, do you want to just give us a little explanation?

**Isabella von Holstein:** Yes. So PRISM stands for Professional Research Investment and Strategy Manager. There is... If you're curious, there is a previous podcast on this series with Anja Roeding that you recorded a number of years ago, so go and find [00:05:00] out more. She founded the network.

**Sarah McLusky:** Yeah, definitely. We'll put a link to that in the show notes.

And finally, Rika. Welcome.

**Rika Nair:** I'm Rika Nair. I'm research culture manager at the University of Warwick, where I'm trying to make Warwick a better place to do research. I also lead the Research Culture Enablers Network, which brings together colleagues trying to do the same at their institutions, and I'm a co-lead on Research Professional Futures, leading the work package four, which is around culture

**Sarah McLusky:** So thanks very much, all of you, for being here to tell us all about the project. And I think the first thing that people listening I'm sure will want to know is what is Research Professional Futures? Lorna, could you give us a bit of an overview of what you're doing and why?

**Lorna Wilson:** Of course. Research Professional Futures is a £4.5 million funded project by Research England, which aims to shape how research is delivered in the UK.

So we seek to achieve this by focusing on research professionals who are professional colleagues who work across a really broad spectrum of increasingly specialized roles, [00:06:00] who are core but often under utilized contributors to research success. So we're not part of the academic community or the technical community.

We bring specialist professional expertise to research to make sure that it is delivered in the most effective, robust, and ethical way. So RPF is co-led between the four of us as we

introduced ourselves with four work packages around context, competencies, concepts, and culture, with a number of key colleagues, including Oxford University Research Consulting, the PRISM Network, ARMA, and also the National Centre for Research Culture too.

**Sarah McLusky:** That sounds like a lot to keep a handle on. So yeah, a lot of stuff going on. And, Rika, you were tell- gonna tell us a little bit more about the programme as well.

**Rika Nair:** One thing to flag that's quite special about this project is that I think it's one of its kind being led by research professionals, but then it was really important for us for this project to be collaborative and to be research informed as well, which is while we've got these partners at the University of Oxford, Department for Education, and while we've got research consulting as well, helping to provide more qualitative and [00:07:00] quantitative evidence so that we can better understand the landscape for research professionals and how it can be improved.

So we've put a lot of thought into how to design this project.

**Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. And certainly tell us... I mean, you, you say that a lot of thought's gone into it. How did it even come about? How did it start? Why do we need a project like this? I feel like in some way, most people listening to this podcast are probably already sold on why we need something like this, but why do we need a programme like this?

So, Steph, were you gonna take that one?

**Steph Bales:** Yeah, so, well, originally we were working on two very separate bids, so one for the PRISM network, that Rika and Isabella were leading and another for research managers and administrators. But they were both focused on similar themes, so recognition, visibility, professionalization.

And I think PRISM's especially sort of focusing on precarity because it was much more of an issue for those roles. But we both submitted our bids separately and then Research England came back to us and said, "Actually, these projects [00:08:00] have got quite a lot in common." And then when we sat down and had a meeting together, we sort of picked these four strands where we felt there was real connectivity across the two projects, and they became the four work packages.

So then we spent probably another year working together to develop the bid and really think about things, and it was a fantastic process actually. I think we all really enjoyed it, and it made a better, much stronger, more comprehensive bid as a result of that.

**Sarah McLusky:** And so what are you hoping will be different as a result of having this programme?

**Steph Bales:** I think that the programme at the moment is probably more important now than ever, particularly in light of the sort of financial crisis that we're in. So I think we're seeing universities being restructured, and a lot of that is being driven by rounds of voluntary severance and compulsory redundancies.

And it's reshaping research offices in a really unplanned and ad hoc way. So I think the blueprint in particular that we're developing will help institutions and the sector have an idea of the skills and the [00:09:00] roles that are needed, the structures that are optimal to support universities. And I think particularly the pilot projects that we're gonna talk about that will be in work package three will provide an opportunity for colleagues to really think about ways of addressing some of those, contracting research officers and the changes to our roles through exploring things like

shared services, the use of AI, in quite a safe space, and then think about how we can roll that out across the sector.

And then just I think, you know, to sort of reiterate what Rika has just said, I think the fact that we're doing this, activity at such a national scale and the volume of stakeholder engagement that we're gonna have through work package one and four, amplified by the commission that we've set up, I think will just really raise the visibility and recognition of research professionals and the value that we bring to the research endeavor.

And I think it will have real credibility because of its scale, and then I think the fact that it's informed by incredible research [00:10:00] delivery partners, Oxford, Research Consulting and ARMA, and then it's led by research professionals, which I think we, we haven't seen before.

**Sarah McLusky:** No, I think I, I thought that when Rika said it before, that it is unusual to see a project of this scale being led by research professionals rather than researchers, than academics.

Is that something that was always intended and something that was important? Yeah, everybody's nodding about that. I think that people, when you said there about raising the visibility, as I said, I think anybody listening to this podcast is probably already sold on the fact that people who are working in these kind of roles don't always get the recognition that they need.

But I think, as you say, the backing of Research England is just gonna add that level of credibility as well, isn't it? And help to raise the profile as well. Yeah, definitely. Isabella, did you want to add something to this?

**Isabella von Holstein:** Yeah. Can I come in and, and add another little dimension to this?

And that's the whole sort of accidental career aspect to this. There's an [00:11:00] awful lot of RPs say that they got into the business accidentally. And now with waves of redundancies going on, people are going to get out of the business accidentally. Well, what do you do then? How do you build a career if you don't actually know what your career could lead to?

And this I think is the, one of the, the real advantages to the PRISM network to partnering with ARMA because we can now look at a much, much wider range of job types, not just PRISMs. And this is where this new concept of an RP, a research professional, came from, so that you can plan a career not just up the little ladder that you happen to be on, but you can sort of spot sideways moves that you could make onto somebody else's ladder, or you have to work out where you could go down a few steps and then climb something else and, but you've got much more of a holistic sense of, well, okay, I've got this set of skills.

Where could I go with this? What am I missing? And what's actually feasible-

**Sarah McLusky:** Yeah ...

**Isabella von Holstein:** at a national scale. And I think that's new and that, really valuable, very comforting.

**Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. I [00:12:00] think that it's, uh, you're, it's so true when you say about accidental careers, 'cause so many people that I've interviewed on this podcast have, yeah, they've just done something and then they went to the next thing, and then a job came up, and they went and did that, and it just seemed like a good idea at the time.

So lots of squiggly careers, yeah. And for people who can't see, Isabella's doing a little squiggly, a little squiggly hand gesture. And, yeah, very squiggly careers. But also, I often talk to people just exactly like you were saying, is that research professional careers are a bit like going up a scramble net, where there's lots of different ways you can get to the top, unlike other professions where it might be more like a ladder and you go to the next step and the next step.

So seeing those sideways moves. And I think a lot of these, something I talk about a lot as well, is the fact that a lot of these jobs just didn't even exist. So I've been working broadly in this area for over 25 years, but when I started, you know, I remember when I, there, in a research department there was maybe an administrator, and then [00:13:00] there would be kind of the research office who helped funding a bit.

But the, so many of these jobs are new jobs. And so for that reason there's just not that history there. Steph, yeah, did you want to come in?

**Steph Bales:** Yeah, that was a real key strand of the bid that we put in, that we said actually there's been this proliferation of new roles created, driven by policy, a lot of it developed by Research England that universities are responding to.

So you've seen this the sector has really expanded, and those new roles have come about. But then what we haven't seen is the kind of concordat or support that we're seeing for other parts of the sector.

**Isabella von Holstein:** Yeah. It, it's not getting any less. You know, with these recent changes from UKRI, with the focus on partnerships and on creating value for the nation, there's an awful lot of specialist knowledge that goes into connecting your academic who's got their really, really deep knowledge of their research into well, might be training them to be a good entrepreneur, or it might be actually providing entrepreneurship services for them, or public engagement services, or partnership services, or project management [00:14:00] services, or whatever it is.

And all of that is now part of research. And in the old days, we didn't have to define research to include all of that complexity. And these days it's different. We're all here for the research.

**Sarah McLusky:** Yes. Absolutely. Absolutely. And so, yeah, tell us then a bit more about the project. You've talked about all these different work packages that you've got and what's actually happened with each of them.

So, maybe if we can go through them in turn, and you can tell us a bit about what each, what that means by work package one, two, three, four. So Lorna, I think you're coming in first for this one.

**Lorna Wilson:** Yeah. And I think it picks up on the discussion we've just been having about the proliferation of roles and how these have changed.

So work package one is all about context. So one of the things we talked about is there's a real lack of understanding about the workforce itself. There's no data that exists about us. exists about us Um, you know, yes, we can speak to colleagues from other institutions and get kind of anecdotal view on, "Well, we've got these types of roles and structures, et cetera."

But often the s- [00:15:00] kind of the way these roles are kind of constructed is very particular for their institutional context, meaning what type of university they're in, for example. But then even within the same university, you know, if you have lots of devolved structures and lots of different things going on, it's very hard to get a picture of that.

So we thought there was real value in kind of creating an almost audit of the research professional landscape to think about, okay, well, these are the types of roles in UK universities that help to support research, so that we can think about then what does a vision for our future look like with, you know, working with stakeholders.

The thing I would really emphasize is this is a project not just that research professionals are here to deliver. We absolutely rely on working with our academic and our technical allies, and also with colleagues in other types of institutions. So we are focusing mainly on, research professionals in UK universities, but we're very aware there are lots of other research professionals that work in industry, that work in research funders, that work in independent research organizations.

We had to give [00:16:00] ourselves a little bit of a boundary because we- Yeah.

**Sarah McLusky:** You can't cover everything ...

**Lorna Wilson:** I don't think, yeah, and Research England weren't gonna give us £20 million. Yeah. So, you know, we gave ourself a bit of a boundary to, you know, to do this. So we're doing, work package one is all about understanding what the workforce looks like, and that's where our fantastic research partners from Oxford and Research Consulting are delivering activity.

But the main mechanism we're using to think about this data is the introduction of a national commission. So this is chaired by Shearer West and has colleagues from across the UK involved, and including our international representative, I should say. And it's, the best way to think about a commission is it operates almost like a national government inquiry.

So the evidence that is collected through the data collection work will be presented to the commission, who then kind of look at that and think, "Okay, as a sector, you know, what are the recommendations that we want to look to make to support the development of the research professional workforce?" Now, we reckon there's at least 20,000 of us across the UK.

So what, you know, what's happening right now in terms of our [00:17:00] roles, but what's gonna happen about the future? And Steph's already spoken a little bit to some of the things that are changing, but it's thinking about, you know, what does research need from us further down the line, and kind of really understanding it.

Now, the Oxford team are leading on our qualitative data work, so they're doing interviews. They have a Delphi panel set up. They're doing focus groups. Research Consulting are leading on our quantitative data work, so we will have institutional surveys and individual surveys. And we're really hoping all of that data and evidence, I think the really important word there is evidence, is gonna really help with the visibility of our workforce, but more importantly, it helps to inform the recommendations as we move forward.

And that's really important in terms of work packages. Whilst they're separate, they're all interconnected and feed into each other, and that's a really important thing that we work hard with the project on. So National Commission, we're really excited because the colleagues that are part of it are so unbelievably passionate.

We had our first commission meeting, and it was just, of course we thought Isabella, Steph, and myself were [00:18:00] absolutely mad about the project. But, you know, hearing the passion coming from colleagues, including academic leaders in the room, is really important. And I think that's also something that's different about this project to any other kind of these projects that

have run before on a smaller scale, which is we have academic colleagues as part of the project helping to deliver it, which is really, really important, operating as our allies. But so yeah, there's lots happening in work package one.

Lots of data collection that feeds the rest of the project,

**Sarah McLusky:** And the data collection piece, I think people might be surprised the extent to which that hasn't been done before. 'Cause I understand that there's most of the data collected, I now can't remember the name of the system that they use to collect data about what's going on in universities, doesn't even include, like, a category to record the people who are doing these kind of roles.

**Lorna Wilson:** Yeah, so he- that's HESA.

**Sarah McLusky:** HESA. Yeah.

**Lorna Wilson:** And they've been looking at how they expand and diversify the data that's collected. But I think one of the things about how our research has been [00:19:00] designed at Oxford Research Consulting teams, it's been informed by us as research professionals as part of, obviously, the leadership team.

And I think it's thinking about how do we extract really rich data. So not just the numbers game, but also understanding, okay, well, this is actually over time how things have changed. One of the things I haven't mentioned as part of this is we're looking at the last eight years of data from jobs.ac.uk that are gonna show and demonstrate lots of interesting trends around how roles have changed, what are some of the, you know, things we see quite frequently in terms of roles being advertised, and seniority, and all these different things. But it's the richness of that data not just those basic figures.

So- Yeah ... we're excited to see what comes out of it. But it's a, a challenge as well. We really rely on communities coming together and engaging with us so that we can collect really great data. We can't just do that ourselves.

**Sarah McLusky:** Steph, you're leading on work package two. Could you tell us a bit about what that entails?

**Steph Bales:** Yeah. So work package two is focused on [00:20:00] competencies and developing this comprehensive professional development framework and an interactive digital platform.

It's important to say that although work package one has started, work package two is yet to start, but it will be very much shaped by the outcomes from work package one. In fact, if- you can't see here, but we have a diagram which shows how work package one and the intelligence that comes in from that informs all of the other work packages.

But specifically from work package one, there's a, there's a systematic review of what exists already in terms of professional development frameworks from the UK and internationally and across similar adjacent professions such as the key professionals. There's this typology of research professional roles that they're trying to develop, and some of that is, Lorna just mentioned, that'll be informed by this data mining that they're doing of jobs.ac.uk.

And then there's all the findings from the interviews, both institutional and individual surveys as well, about research professional roles, the skills that they think they need to undertake the job,

and that they-- what they see as their future needs, because this is [00:21:00] really important as well, sort of thinking about what the future needs are for the sector.

And then when work package two will kick in, based on that, there'll be sort of a series of co-production workshops focused on that evidence base, and that will inform the competencies framework or the professional development framework and what that will look like and how it will be structured. We'll also be developing an interactive digital platform to support that, to make that more of a dynamic interactive tool, and that scope, is still being developed, and we'll be asking research professionals what they would find most useful through interviews and surveys and when we sort of hit the ARMA conference as well next week.

So we're really keen to sort of get an idea from people, and, I mean, Isabella and I have had, with sort of Oxford and Research Consulting as well, quite long conversations, and we're now starting to speak to sort of AI digital academics as well on, on the scope of that and what it might look like.

**Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. Oh, it's good to hear that there... It sounds like, I know we'll come to this in a little bit, but it sounds like [00:22:00]

there

**Sarah McLusky:** there's lots of opportunities for people from the community, people who are actually doing these roles, to get involved and actually contribute to the research as well, which is fantastic.

Practicing, practicing what we preach, as they say. Yeah. Yeah. Excellent. So Isabella, you're leading work package three. Tell us a bit about that.

**Isabella von Holstein:** That's right. Work package three is called Concepts, and it's the money package. So this is the pilot project. So this is going to be an opportunity for people to pilot institutional and also regional initiatives either to enhance an RP role, to future proof an RP role, to explore a new technology, or to provide community support.

There's an evaluation element to that. It's not just delivery. We'll also be evaluating how it worked. So it might be something like a regional shared service, whatever that looks like, whatever would be useful to you, wherever you are. An AI tool. It might be some sort of community building.

But we also hope [00:23:00] to, we were going to put together a national community of practice and then the results will also go on the digital platform.

**Sarah McLusky:** So are those projects already decided, or is that-

**Isabella von Holstein:** Nope ...

**Sarah McLusky:** no, there's gonna be a process

**Isabella von Holstein:** so exactly how this is going to work is also dependent on the outcomes of work package one.

Because we need to know more about what people are actually doing and what they're actually struggling with in order to be able to design a programme that would actually be useful to them. So the intention is for that to run not next year, but the year after, so 2028. So look for news for that next year.

**Sarah McLusky:** Okay. Yeah, interesting. Thank you. And Rika, tell us about work package four.

**Rika Nair:** Sure. So work package four is culture, and it's essentially its own work package because it's about what we want to avoid. So we didn't want, at the end of the project, to have created another toolkit that sits on a shelf or another concordat or something that doesn't get used [00:24:00] or isn't practical.

And so what we're hoping to do with this work package is really to embed co-creation from the start so that we can enrich the work that we're doing and also amplify the work of the different work packages. And we've also included some time within this work package so that whatever we come up with, we've got some time to test it, embed it in a few institutions, refine it.

So it's really here to support the legacy of the project, and it's also here to make sure that we include some of the voices that are, might be easy to avoid. So we're definitely gonna have the champions included in work package one, but we do have some dedicated planning in work package four to consider other stakeholders, including those who don't yet see the value of research professionals.

And what we're hoping to do with this work package eventually is to bring everything together into what we're calling the Research Professional Blueprint. Exactly what that looks like hasn't been decided because it's something we're gonna create with the sector.

**Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. Excellent. And how do you see, 'cause obviously your role is looking at research culture a- [00:25:00] across a whole university, how do you think those two things are gonna dovetail together, so the broader research culture initiatives and then the research culture element of this specific project?

**Rika Nair:** I think they're gonna inform each other. I think what I've learnt from my work as a research culture manager, and I think we've done some work through the Research Culture Enablers Network as well, is a lot of what our role is about is surfacing the missing voices. So that approach that we've got to how we improve our institutions, we're gonna apply here.

And actually, as part of this work package, we do have a dedicated research culture manager, Dr. Katie Reynolds, who's joined the team. So we're really taking this as being integral to the success of the project.

**Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. Excellent. Excellent. Oh, well, it sounds like from what you've said there, there are gonna be...there's lots still to be decided, and so lots of opportunities for people to get involved and to influence and be part of this project. How can [00:26:00] people get involved? What are the opportunities?

**Isabella von Holstein:** So work package one is running at the moment, and there are a number of opportunities to get involved there.

There's an individual survey coming out in the next month. So I think we want 700 responses to that. So we would like to hear from you if you are an RP or if you have been an RP. There's also an institutional survey coming out shortly after that where we want 70 responses. So if you are in a position to persuade your institution to take part in this, please do so if you can.

And we would- we're very keen to make sure that we get input, not just from the whole of the British Isles, despite the fact that this is Research England funded, we do want data from the devolved administrations. And also very much to reflect different types of institutions with different research profiles.

That's really important to us. There's also a Delphi expert panel survey that has already begun. That's quite a small group. There will be focus [00:27:00] groups that are part of work package two, that's the competencies work. That's being set up. That'll be mostly next year. And then of course there's the funding round, which will be mostly the year after that.

And then of course there is the ongoing comms work. Rika can cover that.

**Rika Nair:** Yes. So just to say, as I mentioned, we are really keen with the culture work package to be engaging the community and feeding in any changes or any of those voices that are harder to reach. And so, we have a LinkedIn group that has launched and, my colleague that I mentioned, Katie, is also leading on a series which is gonna be looking at what matters to research professionals and also what matters to those who work with research professionals.

So you could probably join the LinkedIn group as the best way to stay up to date, connect on the website, get in touch with Katie. We've just recently been to Cardiff to test out some of our engagement techniques for the What Matters series, and we'd be happy to go to other institutions as well if people are interested.

**Sarah McLusky:** Fantastic. We can get [00:28:00] a link to that and put that into the show notes. And then are there other ways that people can find out more and stay in touch with the project?

**Steph Bales:** Yeah, so there's a, we've got a new website which is [rpfutures.co.uk](http://rpfutures.co.uk), and if you go to the Get Involved page on there, you can sign up for updates on the project, and then all of the things that Isabella and Rika have just talked about, you can sign up for those as well.

So that's, that's a really good way in for people.

Also Isabella just mentioned the devolved nations, so I am actually moving from Teesside and joining the University of Stirling as their exec director for research innovation and business engagement from the 1st of August.

So although Scotland can't benefit financially from these projects they're still interested in views from the devolved nations, so I still will stay involved, so I'll be able to share some of those views from Scottish colleagues as well.

**Sarah McLusky:** Fantastic. So it's amazing to hear about how much [00:29:00] work there is gonna be happening, and it's clear this is gonna be something to keep an eye on over the next four- four years it is in total?

Yes, we're already kind of part of the way into it, but yeah, four years in total. And yeah, it is amazing, particularly the reason that I started this project, I know I wasn't the only one, 'cause obviously it's the story behind the PRISM Network and everything as well, but the reason I started this podcast was because I felt that people who were in these roles weren't getting enough acknowledgement and enough recognition.

So it is amazing to see something tangible actually happening and going forward, and I'm really looking forward to seeing the difference that it makes to people in research professional careers. So I do like to end all of my episodes with asking my guests of if they had a magic wand, what they would change about the world that they work in.

Rika, perhaps I'll come to you first.

**Rika Nair:** Sure. So to me, I think it's all about visibility. So if I had a magic [00:30:00] wand, I would like more people to know that research professional roles exist, and that they can be

exciting routes into research. And that can be either for colleagues and students already at the universities, the research students, the post-docs, but equally for colleagues from other sectors.

This is a really exciting route into research.

**Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. Excellent use of the magic wand. Lorna, what would you like to do?

**Lorna Wilson:** Uh, I think I would love to hear someone say that they grew up wanting to be a research professional because I think it would show that, you know, to pick up on Isabella's comments earlier, that we don't come here by accident.

That, you know, the visibility of this as an opportunity increases, and that we have people working towards building careers in research professionals, not just seeing them accidentally happen.

**Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. That is definitely something that would be a big change. Steph, what would you like to do with your magic wand?

**Steph Bales:** I think I would like colleagues to accept advice from research professionals. In fact, even seek out their opinion and [00:31:00] accept it first time. I think that people need to think about the impact it has when you're second-guessing or think you know better than someone who's been doing that job for a long time and has real expertise in it.

**Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. Definitely that would be a real evidence of a real shift in mindset as well, wouldn't it- if that happened. Yeah. Yeah. I do... it does happen in some places, but perhaps not as much as it could. Yeah. And Isabella?

**Isabella von Holstein:** I would like universities to understand that keeping professional staff, research professionals in-house long-term, that doesn't mean in the same role, is an advantage, that all of that institutional knowledge, all of that sectoral knowledge, all of that network capital that they have built up, it's worth building structures to keep them.

It's worth building structures so that they can go off and do other things and acquire all of those networks and institutional knowledge and perspective and so on. But there just seems to be such a huge difference between the very, very long [00:32:00] academic career ladders where there's this acceptance that some- that somebody's going to be building expertise over the very long term, and that that's something the university is prepared to support, and then the complete absence of that on the professional side.

I'm not saying we need exactly that. I'm just saying you don't want the churn. When you lose people like that, you lose really valuable knowledge.

**Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. Yeah. That's definitely true. Definitely true. Oh, well, all excellent uses of the magic wand, and I feel like maybe some of those will come out of of this project.

We shall see. We shall see. So before we finish, is there anything that any of you want to bring in that maybe you haven't mentioned, you haven't had a chance to say? Yes, Steph.

**Steph Bales:** I was just gonna say, we mentioned the brilliant work of Katie earlier, but we also have Karen O'Riordan as well, who is providing all of our project [00:33:00] support at the moment and makes a huge difference.

So she actually is at the, in the engine room making all of this project happen, so I just wanted to mention her.

**Sarah McLusky:** Fantastic. So thanks, thanks Karen as well. You're getting a thumbs up from Isabella. So it just remains to say then, thank you so much to all of you for taking the time to come along, tell us all about this project, and it is very much a case of watch this space.

So we'll put all the links and everything in the show notes, including how people can get in touch with the project, how they can get in touch with you personally. But for now, thank you so much.

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Research Adjacent is presented and produced by Sarah McLusky, and the theme music is by Lemon Music Studios on Pixabay. And you, [00:34:00] yes you, get a big gold star for listening right to the end. See you next time.