

Research adjacent ripples - wrapping up Research Adjacent after 100 episodes with Sarah McLusky and Andy Tattersall

(Research Adjacent Episode 100)

Sarah reflects on community, legacy and lessons learned with guest host Andy Tattersall

<https://researchadjacent.com/episode-100/>



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

Hello and welcome to the 100th episode of Research Adjacent. Now, I am, as always, your host, Sarah McLusky, except I'm kind of not today. Today, we have a guest host, and I am going to be the interviewee. So although at this stage I would normally give you a bit of an introduction to the episode, I think we will just get into it.

I'll give a little bit of an introduction to our host, and then I will hand over. So our host today is Andy Tattersall. Andy Tattersall is a veteran of many podcasts, amongst other things, and it's how we met. If you want to find out more about Andy and what he does, then you can go back and listen [00:01:00] to the episode where Andy was a guest on the podcast.

But being a fellow podcast geek, Andy has agreed to be the host for this episode and interview me. So I'm gonna now hand over to Andy, and we'll take it from there.

Andy Tattersall: Hello, Sarah. Thank you for inviting me to be a host. Kind of reversing roles here a little. Well, I host and now hosting yours, which is a great honor.

100 episodes. Well done.

Sarah McLusky: Thank you. It does feel like sometimes it feels like it. Yeah, it's a lot.

Andy Tattersall: Yeah. It is a lot, but it, I think it kind of highlights the breadth and the depth of the community that you've served as part of this. And so let's go back to the beginning

of Research Adjacent. What is the story behind it, and how did it start?

Sarah McLusky: Yeah. Sure. So I think I have told this story a few times before, but just for anybody who hasn't heard it, basically I had something I wanted [00:02:00] to talk about. I had a bit of a bee in my bonnet, and I wanted to find a way to put it out into the world. The other thing that I was... So I'd already done a podcast before, and so when you look at the channels that are available to you, you know, you can do blogs, you can do videos, you can do podcasts, whatever.

I'd already done a podcast for a research project that I'd worked on called Life for Breath, and really enjoyed it, and I'd taught myself how to use editing software, you know, all that kind of stuff. As people, if they've listened to any of the episodes, might have also gathered by now, I quite like talking, so that was another thing as well.

And I wasn't super comfortable being on video, partly because the, the technical side of things I was a little bit nervous about. As I say, I knew how to edit audio. I wasn't sure how to edit video at the time. And also myself, I just was a bit nervous about being on camera, and I know that again, with some guests, they're more likely to agree to be guests if it's audio only.

So I thought, "Right, okay, I'm gonna do a podcast." So then the question was what am I gonna, [00:03:00] what am I gonna do about, like, what's gonna be the angle? And the thing that I had a bit of a bee in my bonnet about was in the job that I'd been in before I went freelance, we'd been starting to have the conversations about research culture that have really expanded now.

And what was becoming clear then, and I did talk to my old boss, Jane Macnaughton, about it a lot, who's fantastic. She's an academic. And, we were only talking about the researchers, and at the time I was an institute manager of a research institute, and I was just like, "Why are we not talking about all these other people who are involved in research? Why is their job security and the way that they're treated and the recognition that they get, why is that not as important as the researchers?" So I just started to, you know, get a bit like, "Right, okay, I think I've got something to, to say here." I did write a couple of blog posts and things, but then I wasn't quite sure [00:04:00] where it was gonna go until, I think it was in the back of my head, I think because I wasn't sure what I was gonna call it, and then as often happens, the best ideas come to you when you least expect it, and I was out for a walk, walking the dog.

I remember where I was, and research adjacent popped into my head, and I was like, "That's it. If I call it research adjacent, it's got the angle. It says what it is. It's catchy." I could see how it all kind of panned out from there. Now, I should say I didn't invent the term research adjacent, but I had seen it used on Twitter by Kirsty Ross, who was the very first guest episode that I put out. She very kindly came along and did it, and I'd seen her use the term research adjacent. But as

you do, I went away and searched, and actually there weren't many other people using it. There was somebody who'd used it for some dancing sheep on Twitter.

Uh, but yeah, they were a sheep researcher, and they'd been to, like, a country fair sort of thing. You know, agricultural show kind of thing, and there was somebody, there was this [00:05:00] video of somebody who was getting their sheep to, like, kneel down and stand up in time to music. It was just mad. So because they were a sheep researcher, they said research adjacent.

Andy Tattersall: It feels like a piece of, uh, Ig- Ig Nobel. This feels like an Ig Nobel Research Prize.

Sarah McLusky: It was just a bit mad, so I was like, "Okay, Kirsty and dancing sheep, these are things I'm happy to be associated with." So I went with research adjacent, and when I started it, I just thought, "Right, I'll commit to doing 10 episodes and just thought, just see how it goes.

And I honestly didn't know if it would get beyond 10 episodes, but it did, and here we are now at 100. So yeah.

Andy Tattersall: Well, the community, the research adjacent community, you've got your own community, the research adjacent community, and we think about the actual wide, a lot of people may not appreciate they're in a research adjacent community, but they are.

That very, very... and as your podcast has [00:06:00] highlighted, just the myriad of different roles, the diversity of that community, and the size of it. What was the reaction to the podcast?

Sarah McLusky: Yeah, so I think that is absolutely a reason why I have kept going beyond those initial 10 episodes. Very quickly actually, people started responding to it, which was so gratifying.

But by far, even now, the most common thing that people say about the podcast is that they feel seen, and they feel seen in a way that they just weren't being seen in other- You know, it's come up a lot in various episodes over the course of the series, is that the, the work of a research-adjacent professional is almost by definition invisible.

You're the person behind the scenes. You're the person who helps to put the [00:07:00] researcher on the podium, in the spotlight, helps to get the publications out. And often our name doesn't go on it. We're not rewarded for that work in terms of promotions or even financially. Just even just somebody saying thank you sometimes.

So I think these roles are very hidden and very underappreciated. And so for people to say, "Thank you for talking about this, and I feel that finally somebody is recognizing it," was just, just hugely, hugely gratifying. It did feel like I touched a nerve. So yeah, very quickly people responded to it and started suggesting guests, people started putting themselves forward, and I thought, "Okay, let's just keep it going and see how it goes."

And we've now got to the point, I did look up some of the stats if people are interested. Podcast stats are notoriously slippery, but it looks like it's a, it's been over 20,000 downloads of the podcast, so over the 100 episodes. So that's a lot of people [00:08:00] listening and being interested in this topic, so yeah.

Yeah.

Andy Tattersall: Absolutely. It's a fantastic testament. And say the 100 episodes and nearly four years is a long time in podcast years, and I appreciate the effort that goes into podcasts, and I

can see the work you do, not just in the, you know, the, it's the tracking down, researching the topics, the guests, the recording, getting dates in diaries and all that kind of business.

The questions, formulating the discussion. And there's all the other stuff you've done around the kind of the communications, the editing, et cetera. I don't think people appreciate the work that you've put into this, because a lot of where, people will see a lot of polished research podcasts or things like that, they won't realize that there's probably a team behind there.

There's a learning technologist in there. There's a podcast editor, there's a host. You've done this all yourself. So, you know, do you [00:09:00] wanna talk about the work that's gone behind this? 100 episodes, four years, it's a lot of work.

Sarah McLusky: It, it is Andy, and I know that you more than many people appreciate just how much work it is that goes on behind the scenes.

So yeah, so Research Adjacent is just me. Also nobody pays me to do it, so it absolutely started as a passion project because I had something that I wanted to say and, and I had a channel to do it. So yeah, so it involves, it, as you say, sourcing the guests, setting up the interviews, recording them.

I do the editing, I do the website, I do the graphic design for the podcast images. I manage all the social media channels. I did... I mean, some of the things that I have had to do I did very early on. I started going once a week, and I very early on realized I just couldn't keep it [00:10:00] up. So I've now gone down to fortnightly.

It's been fortnightly almost ever since. Occasionally I've missed one over holidays, but, but basically it's been fortnightly ever since. And each one of those episodes, I think if you add it up, is probably two days' work. So it's probably been a day a week for nearly four years that I've been working on this.

So, as you say, it's a lot of work. I'm hugely proud of it. I'm proud of myself for, for just putting myself out there, for just saying, "This is something that I want to do. I've got something that I want to share. I'm gonna find a way to do it and figure it out." That's very much how I operate.

I'll just jump in and just figure it out as I go. Build the plane as you fly. So I'm hugely proud of myself for figuring out how to do it. I'm hugely proud of myself for keeping it going, because there's maybe some people listening who know me and know that keeping things going over a long period of time [00:11:00] isn't always, isn't always a strong suit for me.

So I will be absolutely honest about that. And also, I am really proud of that community. I'm really proud that I've given people a space to come together, that I've given people a language to talk about what they do. I've helped people to find each other. I mean, you know, for example, Andy, you and I would not be sitting here together in this room today if it wasn't for the podcast.

If I hadn't put that out into the world. I've met so many amazing people through it. It is incredible for networking, so you get to trap people in a room with you for, like, an hour. So it's amazing for networking. Also, I have met some people who are now genuinely friends through the podcast as well.

So it's had its benefits. I also think that the, the guests and the stories they've shared, and have shared them really honestly, have really helped people. So I'm very proud of it, but it is, it has been a [00:12:00] lot of work. Yes.

Andy Tattersall: So with that in mind, why have you decided to call it an end? Is it the, the sheer amount of effort?

Like, say, a day a week for four years is quite an endeavor. So why now call it an end at 100? Were you dreading the thought of 200?

Sarah McLusky: That's probably part of it. I was, I think I- there's a lot of different reasons behind it.

So one of them is the workload, definitely, and, and just the fact that it just felt like it was becoming a little bit unsustainable. And as you say, it's sort of thinking, right, if I go past 100, like, how long am I gonna realistically keep this going and what does it look like? The other reason though is, some of the other reasons are actually really positive ones.

So I think that is because when I started this podcast nearly four years ago, people weren't talking about this stuff, and now they are. And [00:13:00] that, I'm not saying it's all me, 'cause it's absolutely not. There's lots of other people working on this as well, people working on research culture. The people on, for example, the Research Culture Uncovered podcast, they're talking about the same stuff. But now people are talking about it, and as people are talking about it, they're starting to say, "Hang on a minute. This isn't fair. These people deserve more recognition, more support, career paths," whatever it is. And stuff is happening. And so there's things like the Research Professional Futures, which is a massive Research England funded program, even though it's covering the whole of the UK. But yeah, Research England funded program, which is gonna look at some of this stuff, like career progression pathways and things like that for research-adjacent folks.

There's also another Research England funded project, which is the Hidden REF project, and they are also doing a lot of work around what they call [00:14:00] hidden roles in research. So it's exactly the same people, but how do we make sure that they're being recognized and acknowledged for the work that they do?

So there's real money going into this now, and we all know that in the research world, where there's money, you know, if you want anything to really happen, you need to put money behind it. Also as well, it's great to see these things happening, because I'm not in a position to actually change anything.

I'm essentially, I'm like the journalist, the news reporter. I can say, "Look at what's going on," but I, actually, it's not in my power to change it. So the fact that people who are in positions to change things are taking this fight forward I think is hugely positive. And it, and it's part of the reason that just makes me think, yeah, my work here is done.

And, and it's not, uh, this isn't something that's ever gonna be finished. Like, research culture isn't just fixed now, you know? But it's time to hand that baton on to other people who can actually really change things. So yeah.

Andy Tattersall: I'm sure, you know, like anything, [00:15:00] and the role that you do, and similar to myself, it's a learning process. So you'll have been learning these last four years. Is there anything that, uh, you would have done differently looking back, where you kind of go, "Oh, when I started out I wish I'd not done that?" The, I mean, an example would be doing it every week. Yeah. Is there anything else?

Sarah McLusky: Oh, there's so many things. Yeah, partly doing it every week, that's one. I don't know why I thought... I think it's 'cause I thought I was only gonna do 10 episodes. So yeah, I was like, "Oh, yeah, I'll do it every week." And at the time, um, anybody who is freelancer, if you're not freelance, this is what it's like being freelance, is, the work comes in kind of ups and downs, peaks and troughs.

When I started doing it, I was quite quiet for work, so I had time. And then it was like, "Oh, no, actually I can't keep this going." So that's definitely something. There's other things I can see where I made it much more difficult for myself than it needed to be. Some of it's actually because the technology's moved on.

So again, that's another thing. In four years, some of the technology's moved on. The tools I use to edit the podcast now are actually different to what I started with and much easier, which is great. Um, AI [00:16:00] is no help whatsoever. If anybody's thinking I edit any of this with AI, I don't, because the AI just, it just does horrible things.

Makes the sound sound awful, and it makes... It does summaries that are just not the thing. It doesn't pick out the things I would pick out. So AI hasn't helped, but some things like text-based editing have really helped. But yeah, things that, things that I wish I'd done differently. Starting a whole separate website was really unnecessary.

Doing, at one point in the early days, and I have stopped this now, but I was on, on, like, all the social media channels, and I was just like, that was unsustainable. So now it's only on LinkedIn. Again, some of it's nuances around the way I edit it. I did this kind of complicated way that the music fades in and out, which then the edit is quite tricky.

Uh, and things like that, that I now know I would not do again if I was doing it from scratch. But some of that is quite kind of granular stuff for people who don't know podcasting.

Andy Tattersall: [00:17:00] Yeah, and in terms of the hundred that you've produced, well, this is the hundredth, but say, the first 96, 97, which are the sort of the more memorable moments for you?

Apart from interviewing me. We'll put that down as a given. Yeah,

Sarah McLusky: that's number one, obviously.

Andy Tattersall: Um, but what other favorites have you had ?

Sarah McLusky: Yeah. So I think this one. It is, it's like picking between your children, so I don't have any favorite episodes. Although I only have one child, so she is my favorite.

But anyway, um, I've made some notes on this 'cause I wanted to make sure I didn't, I didn't miss anything or anyone out. So these are some of the things that have been really memorable moments for me. A big one is, as I say, has been getting to know people. In fact, without doubt, the biggest highlight of all of this for me is the people. But there's a few people I want to give a particular shout-out to 'cause they've been huge supporters of the show, and that [00:18:00] is, Orla Kelly, who not only was one of the first people to pick up on it in LinkedIn and start sharing it, she's been on the podcast twice as guest, and she has also suggested other guests to me as well, and continues to be a huge supporter.

And as I say, I would say me and Orla are friends now. Simon Cutler, who has been, again, so many of the guests on this podcast were recommended by Simon Cutler, and Simon introduced

me. He's one of those people who just knows everybody and kind of connects the dots and just says, "Oh, you should talk to them, and you should talk to them," and everything.

So yeah. And then, Ged Hall and the team at the Research Uncovered podcast. Because both podcasts started at roughly the same time, we've also found each other very quickly and we've just really helped each other out. So Research Uncovered podcast team, big shout-out to them.

And then a couple of other people who behind the scenes have been really supportive, and that's Lorraine Coghill and Holly Prescott, who always send nice messages and things like that as well. And yourself, of course, Andy, for agreeing to do this episode. So [00:19:00] yeah. Some of the other things that are really memorable, some of it was sitting down with people who I've known for ages.

So inevitably quite a few of the people on the podcast are people who are preexisting friends or people that I've worked with before. And for example, Helen Riding, who, she's a research manager at the NHS. She's one of my best friends, but we've never actually sat down and talked about work.

So actually finding out the backstory and finding out what she kind of actually does, that's, that was, that was fantastic. I really enjoyed the live episodes that I did at the Vitae conference and the Impact Ignite. And one of the things that happened at the Vitae conference, which was very memorable for me, it was the first time that somebody kind of recognized me, and it was very weird.

So somebody, and I now can't remember who it was 'cause I met so many people at that conference, they came up and they started chatting away to me like we were friends. And I did this thing of like, "Where do I know you from?" [00:20:00] And then they said something about, "Oh, I was listening to the podca-" Like, I was in this podcast.

I was like, "That's where you know me from." And there's something about, there's an intimacy to listening to podcasts, I think. They talk about it as being companion media, and so people really, they feel that they know, you feel that you know the host. They, 'cause they're like your friend, and they're coming on your walk with you or doing the dishes with you or whatever it is.

And so that was really lovely. It's happened a few times since, but that first time I was a bit taken aback, and I was like, "Oh, okay. This is, this is how it goes." Another kind of memorable episode as well is, so again, Andy, you and I have talked about this a lot. You're really into your music.

I'm also really into my music. For me, I'm a kinda indie kid, and when I interviewed Sam Steele, and it turned out that she had been somebody who was introduced to me by Simon Cutler, by the way. Again, the introductions thing there. And she used to be Steve Lamacq, radio DJ Steve Lamacq's [00:21:00] producer.

Yeah. And you know when you just get a little bit, like, starstruck, and she'd worked on Radio 1 and met all these musicians and everything like that. So yeah, I was a bit starstruck there. Another thing as well that I'm really proud of is that I have used the podcast not only to raise the profile of all the kind of usual suspects in terms of research-adjacent roles, but I'm really proud that through it I did the episode with people with lived experience, so, Helen White and Danny Esler, who work as patient advocates with a womb cancer research charity.

So I, I loved giving them the space to share their story. That I've had so many freelancers on as well because, again, I think it's really hard sometimes for them, sometimes to explain what the

reality's like for people who are freelancing in this world, and I think people who are employed often, don't get it.

But also for them just to kind of, yeah, share what they do and get that out into the world.

[00:22:00] And then the recent episode as well that I've done with the artists who do creative output based on research. And again, really glad that I had the opportunity to give a space for them to share their story 'cause again, I don't think we hear enough from people like that.

So yeah, those are some of my kind of memorable moments which, sorry if that came out like a bit of a list, but it's 'cause I did write that. Normally I just do things off the cuff, but I didn't want to forget, so I did write that down.

Andy Tattersall: I think it's quite important, especially given how many you've done and the kind of the breadth of everything that you've covered.

What do you think the podcast has achieved as well externally? You've talked about how it's contributed to the conversation around the research adjacent community, and particularly I think especially at the moment where HE is changing, transforming, and professional service is often at the brunt of that and professionals are getting squeezed and pushed.

What do you think about the lasting legacy, the impact? I think this is the great thing [00:23:00] about podcasts. That a lot of podcasts are very kind of timely, as in they kind of, they address the current news situation. Might be a news one. But yours are stories and conversations that have got a, a long tail to them.

They're not necessarily something for today. It's a conversation that can be picked up by someone early in their career two years down the line and hear a voice. So what about the kind of the legacy or the impact? 'Cause obviously we like to use the term impact. Oh, the term-

Sarah McLusky: What is the, that impact? Impact in HE. Yes. Um, so as in, with a good impact head on, I should be thinking about how I evidence that impact, and I don't know that I can other than, as I say, some of the stories that people have told me. I think as you say, it is I think a unique resource actually. There's a lot of stuff out there which talks about things like PhD careers and, you know, things like that, and showcasing various jobs that people have gone on to after PhDs.

But I don't think there is anything else, and if anybody has found it, please let me [00:24:00] know. I don't think there's anything else which centers these research professional roles. And that is something that I was adamant from the start. So I was adamant from the start that it would be research professionals only, and no researchers in it, because they are looked over.

So I think that, for me, is the big impact, is just raising the profile of these roles. And I think it's not something... I don't think I can put numbers on it, but I think anybody who's been around this world for a while would tell you this is something that we weren't talking about four years ago, and now we are talking about it, and there's money behind it, and there's projects and work being done.

I should say there's grassroots stuff as well. I was just talking to somebody at University of Bath the other day, and they've got a research enablers network and, you know, they're kind of ground-up, self-organizing and doing stuff. So, so there's things happening, and I think that's part of the [00:25:00] legacy.

I think the fact that I am independent, and I'm not attached to an organization and beyond this mission to share the stories, I don't have a particular axe to grind. And so I've just been able to let people talk and share their stories, and I think people have been incredibly open about not just the successes, but also the challenges of where they're at.

And I think that openness has created just an incredible resource for anybody who is either in these roles currently or who's considering this as a career to find out, you know, that reality of what it's like. And- this sense that we say... I used, I used to do a lot of work in STEM education, and we would always talk about how people need role models who they can resonate with, who, who are kind of look like them or doing a similar job to them and what it is.

And I think now there's such an archive that I hope people can go into that archive and find somebody whose story they resonate [00:26:00] with, whether it's on an inspirational level, whether it's to give them comfort if they're going through a difficult time. And, I hope that that will be the legacy of the podcast.

And yeah, the back catalog will be available indefinitely. I can't promise it'll be available forever, but, it's gonna be available indefinitely so people can go back and dig into it whenever they need to. And some of the episodes as well, there is the career stories, but there are also some of the episodes which focus on particular topics.

So there's one on imposter syndrome, on imposter moments as Jenny likes to call them, not imposter syndrome. There's one on imposter moments. There's some on working your way through change, which as you said, is something that's happened a lot in, in HE at the moment. So people can go and dig into those past episodes, even if it means re-listening at difficult time.

Boundaries. There's an episode on boundaries, which I think I've reposted sometimes at the holidays. So yes. Yeah.

Andy Tattersall: I'm sure people will dig into because it's a great way to kind of get that CPD when professional people don't necessarily are given the time or allowing themselves to have time.[00:27:00]

The podcast format is a brilliant way that you can on your 30-minute commute, listen to one of your episodes and listen to like-minded voices and there's such a range that they can pick through. In terms of, you know, we talked about learning process and things you might have done differently, but what about yourself?

Have you learnt anything about yourself or is there something that you've, somebody you've interviewed and you've learnt something that you probably didn't anticipate? There's kind of some, you know, you mentioned some of the guests in the past, but is there any particular lessons you might have learned and say, what have you learnt about yourself? 'Cause it's quite revealing yourself.

Sarah McLusky: Yeah, it is. I think so if you go back, don't go back. In fact, I'm gonna say don't go back and listen to the early episodes.

They make me cringe. Like the first, the particularly the one which went out as the third episode where I interviewed my friend Colin, and it sounds like I'm doing a job interview, and it, and it makes me cringe. So yeah, don't listen to that one. Although Colin's great. So listen to it and just listen to Colin, but don't listen to me.

I've learned [00:28:00] how to interview people I think is one thing I've learned. I've learned that I like interviewing people. I've learned that I'm more comfortable in front of a microphone than I expected. I've learned actually to be quite comfortable listening to my own voice and seeing myself on camera, which I definitely didn't like in the beginning.

And it's interesting that, that... one of the reasons I made it a guest interview podcast was because I didn't want to be the center of attention, and I was very aware of that going into it. But actually through doing the podcast, there are some solo episodes and I've learned that I can do it on my own and I can hold it on my own and I can...

Sorry if you just got a funny noise there. That's the dog shaking himself. But that's the real podcast moment, and I will leave that in. I'm not gonna cut it out. Yeah. So yeah. I, I think, and I've also learned through doing some of the... We talked about this before. I've learned I don't want to be a podcast editor.

So I could [00:29:00] make a career for myself, I'm sure, doing other people's podcasts. I like hosting them. I like the talking. I love meeting people and hearing their stories. It's absolutely my favorite bit of it. I find the editing and the production side of things a lot more tricky. So yeah. So I would say those are the things that I've learned about myself.

Oh, in terms of what I've learned from my guests, I mean, they're just so, so many really fascinating people. I mean, there's been times I've talked to people and I've just thought, "I took a wrong career journey somewhere. Why am I not doing what you're doing?" So there's sometimes that. There sometimes has been things which are so far out of my area of expertise.

Like, I remember the, Susan Shanks and Alice Miller, who I interviewed, who are archivists, and that is just a world that I know nothing about. And so that was really interesting from that perspective. Um, but yeah. Yeah. I think so many... It's actually, I can't pick things that I've learned.

Andy Tattersall: [00:30:00] Well, it's part of your podcast, you always ask guests what they could change if they had a magic wand. So let's turn the tables. What would you change about the research adjacent world if you could?

Sarah McLusky: Oh, I know I agreed to this question, but I put this question in because I felt like I had to, but it's such a hard- And I, I know I feel for my guests. It's such a hard, it's such a hard question to answer. And, but I have thought about it, and I think if I had a magic wand, I would just love to take the pressure off a bit. And I think so many of the people who are inhabiting this world are under so much pressure, whether it's pressure to bring in funding, whether it's pressure... if you get the funding, the pressure doesn't stop. Like, people think you get the funding and that's the end of it, but then you're under pressure to deliver against that funding, 'cause if you don't deliver against that funding, then you're not gonna get more funding. There's the pressure for REF, there's the pressure for league tables, there's the pressure for student recruitment.

It's just feels like people [00:31:00] never get a break. And I speak to people and they're just so exhausted from that constant hamster wheel of, onto the next thing, onto the next thing, onto the next thing. And if there was a way to just, uh, yeah, just take the foot off the gas a bit and give everybody a break.

And I actually think as everybody, everybody knows that, like I said, where I got the idea for the podcast was out on a walk. Everybody knows that your best work comes actually when you're

not under pressure to grind something out. And I just think the whole system, it has become so tense and metric-driven, and it reminds me of probably one of my favorite quotes from the podcast, which comes into my head quite a lot.

She's from Orla Kelly, which is, "You don't make a pig fat by weighing it." And I feel that we're doing an awful [00:32:00] lot of weighing of pigs, and not a lot of letting those pigs get fat, even though I'm vegan, and I wouldn't eat the pig anyway. But it can get fat and happy. But yeah.

Andy Tattersall: That's a great quote. I really like that. It is a great quote, because we know that people, great professionals, great research-adjacent professionals flourish when they've got the time, the bandwidth, and the permission to adjust the world around them, rather than just react to it, which often unfortunately, I think the academic world looks upon them as that's what they should do.

You react to everything and you don't question things, whereas we know that the really good research-adjacent people are the ones who say, "This system isn't working. This little thing here that you rely on doesn't work. We can do things differently. Let me go off and let me, let me change that." Give them the freedom, and they'll achieve great things.

So, so let's hope. You get to wave your wand, and let's hope-

Sarah McLusky: Yeah. Yeah ...

Andy Tattersall: things do, [00:33:00] do get... And so what's next for you? Obviously you've got your consultancy, you're working, and that continues. So what next? 'Cause there's a, there's gonna be a little void here. Now, whether it is filled with other things work-wise, or you just go and have a little walk and ice cream, but I, you know, I get the impression, and as you've interluded here, this is not the end of you making pod- something's going to happen.

Uh, it may be, like, some occasional episodes of Research Adjacent. I don't know. But what is next? What have you got in your head that you are wanting to do?

Sarah McLusky: Oh, so you see, yeah, you can just tell. Podcasters never die. It's like we've just got the idea for the next podcast. So this is now my third podcast that I've done.

So there's the Life of Breath one, then there's Research Adjacent, and I did one called Academic Adventures, for Orla Kelly, and that's all about academic entrepreneurs in Scotland. Um- So I think one thing that this podcast has actually done, as I say, one of the things it's made me realize, I do like talking.

I am comfortable [00:34:00] being on camera, being behind a microphone, stuff like that. But it has also given me the confidence to actually lean into the things that I do think I'm best at, and the things that I most enjoy. One of them being talking to people and helping people to have conversations, actually, and helping to draw out conversations.

And so that's the main thing that I do through my consultancy work, but through helping people to run better events, better meetings, better consultancy processes. You know, creating those situations where people can have really good conversations that actually make a difference and that actually move things forward.

So that is the main bit of my work. You see, you're getting a sneak right here. I'll give it away, world exclusive. There will be another podcast. It's gonna be called Gathering With Purpose. I can't promise when it's gonna come out, but it's all gonna be about events and meetings and

how [00:35:00] we do them better, because that is, I have learned, something that I can talk about and talk about and talk about.

So I have a lot to say. Uh, so yeah, maybe in the autumn. We'll see. I might, having learned from doing this one, it might be in seasons rather than an ongoing thing, but, we shall see. Watch this space.

Andy Tattersall: Not one a week. Not one a week. Not one a week.

Sarah McLusky: No. Not one a week. Unless it's, like, 10 minutes long and very minimal, but yeah.

Andy Tattersall: Well, it sounds like, it sounds like a great idea, and it's playing again to your strengths. And if anything, like, the Research Adjacent podcast for yourself has been that process- iterative process to get you to where you are now- Yeah ... that next stage, and like you say, playing to those strengths that you've got and as a communicator.

And I think, you know, this medium is so important. I think it's still... we're biased, aren't we?

Sarah McLusky: We are.

Andy Tattersall: But this is massively undervalued in the academic world, where we're seeing, you know, we've been used to our micro conversations on X for years, and [00:36:00] now BlueSky and LinkedIn. We're seeing an awful lot of AI slop, a lot of stuff that's been removed from the human element, and the podcast is something that is human. And we are humans. We're involved in research about humans primarily.

Sarah McLusky: Yeah. It's again, it's this, you know, people talk about trust recession, and people don't trust research and whatever. Podcasts, don't quote me on this, but I have definitely read research about it, are one of the most trusted medium, because there's something about having somebody in your ears when you're just doing your everyday life, which builds trust incredibly quickly. So other than face-to-face stuff, which is the best trust building, I think podcasts are probably next. So yeah.

Andy Tattersall: Well, I look forward to it. You're not someone who's gonna sit down and just stop, so- ... uh, it's quite evident. You're very, very productive, and you've got your workflow. So thank you for, thank you for being a guest on your podcast.

Sarah McLusky: It's a very [00:37:00] weird thing.

Andy Tattersall: But thank you for asking me. I don't know. I might have been the 748th person you asked- ... and everyone else declined.

Sarah McLusky: Oh, no. You were the first. You were the first.

Andy Tattersall: Oh, well, thank you. So yeah. It is, it's... I genuinely mean this, it's a real honor because I know, I've known your podcast for quite a long time, and it's a real honor to have been asked to do this and to kind of, for you to set sail onto the next thing and so thank you.

Sarah McLusky: Oh, thank you so much for agreeing to do it, Andy, and, always, always good to speak to you. And just to say the final word, thank you to everybody listening to this episode. If you've only listened to this one, if you've listened to every single episode, I appreciate you so much.

We would not be here without you. I wouldn't have kept going if nobody was listening. And, we've all created this together. It hasn't really just been me.

Laura Breen: Hi Sarah, it's Laura Breen. So just musing on the wrap-up of the Research Adjacent podcast, 'cause it's [00:38:00] played such an important role in bringing people together across different sectors, different communities, and really finding those commonalities and shared passions. So thank you for that 'cause so much of it has been down to your own openness and curiosity, and I'm really gonna miss your calming presence and that familiar voice, and I think a lot of people will. But I think also the great thing is it's brought people together in real life too, so I'm sure that will continue to happen. So here's to the research adjacent ripple effects. Long may they live.

Simon Cutler: Hi, Sarah. Simon Cutler from the University of Reading here. I've got very fond memories of listening to these podcasts, and I'd like to thank you on behalf, I suppose, of the community for making us much more aware of these invisible and hidden roles, support roles, professional roles that exist often behind the scenes.

I've particularly enjoyed introducing you and listeners to some of the fantastic people in [00:39:00] my own network, some really interesting people who make a big difference. Thank you for everything you've done good luck with what comes next.

Saneeya Qureshi: Hi, Sarah. I just wanted to say thank you. One of the things that I've always admired is really how you've created a space where people could talk honestly about the realities of their careers in and around research. And you played a huge part in helping to normalize the fact that research careers are rarely linear and that uncertainty is a part of the journey because there's so many different ways to make a meaningful contribution to research.

And you've really given our community a voice and celebrated the diversity of our careers. Thank you for your generosity, your curiosity, especially that kickstarted the [00:40:00] Research Adjacent podcast, and really for everything you've done for our community.

Orla Kelly: For me, the podcast brilliantly highlights the diversity of functions across the research landscape and how we all interplay to create a system that is so much more than the sum of our parts. One of the really lovely things about the podcast is hearing the enthusiasm from all the guests about their roles and the communities they work with and their mission to do good things well.

It's been a real privilege to find you through the Research Adjacent podcast, Sarah, and then for us to go on to secure funding to create our own little side project with the Academic Adventures podcast, and even step into the real world to host two live events. And these are the fun things that happen when you let curiosity lead the way.

Lorraine Coghill: Hi, Sarah. It's Lorraine Coghill here. A massive, massive thanks for everything you've done with the Research Adjacent Podcast. [00:41:00] I am so aware of the huge amount of work that you have put into this, and your dedication and enthusiasm have really made it a success. I was lucky enough, thank you so much, to be a guest way back on episode 12, and so your announcements really made me reflect on just how much has changed since then.

And really, so much of that change has been influenced by you and what you've championed. Through the podcast, you've supported so many of us across the sector. You've shone a light on countless hidden careers and highlighted the enormous effort that goes into not only making research happen but ensuring it delivers meaningful real-world impact.

You've given a voice to people and professions that are often overlooked. Perhaps most importantly, you've helped create a sense of community and collective purpose. You've shown us that we're not working in isolation but as part of a movement that can improve ways of working, raise recognition, and ultimately, make things better for everyone.

While the podcast might be coming to an end, its impact certainly [00:42:00] won't. The conversations, the connections, the inspiration you've created will continue, and knowing you, I'm sure this is the start of yet another exciting and impactful chapter. I'm looking forward to seeing what that is, and I'll be there, and I'll be cheering you along the way.

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. You can also find all the links and other episodes at www.researchadjacent.com.

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.