##### Researcher

Excellent. Right. So I hope you kind of maybe got a chance to skim over the participant information. It shouldn't hopefully shouldn't take too long. So let's get started with the very first question. So could you just tell me sort of a bit about yourself and your career and your background, please?

##### Participant 1

Yeah, sure. So I'm not... I'm very recent, very new, to academia, in as much as I finished my PhD in 2016. Before that I kind of came to the UK, and I drifted and I changed careers. I ran my own business, which was kind of a [business type]. And I worked in bars and restaurants and typical service industry kind of things which is not unusual for a migrant. This was the kind of migrant route into work that was before - I'm [nationality] - before [home country] joined the EU. So access to work was VISA-bound, so I was bound by very strict rules. I got my settled status, became a British citizen in 2008, which is around about the same time I was doing consultancy work. I was working for a [business type] consultancy and moved into [discipline]. And I started my master's. I started a master's in [discipline]. And I only did a year of it when one of the professors said to me, “you know what, have you thought about a PhD?” And I kind of had, just hadn't conceptualised it, hadn't formed it as a clear goal, clear opportunity. So around about that time, [previous institution], which is where I was doing my master's, were offering scholarships for PhDs. So I put together my proposal and applied in 2013. Got my PhD in 2016. And since then, I've kind of worked as a lecturer. But because of my [discipline] background, I found myself in the more kind of, programme management route. So, I delivered a programme, a [discipline] programme, on behalf of [previous institution] for a year. And since then, I've been at [current institution] where I am a lecturer and programme director for [programme].

##### Researcher

Excellent. So kind of, can you tell me a bit about the different aspects of your job? So research, education, administration... enterprise, if that's part of it. Can you kind of tell me your different responsibilities in each of those areas?

##### Participant 1

Yeah, sure. So I'm currently trying to transition into what is known as a [research] contract. So [current institution] have two different job families to establish for what you might call tenure track. Obviously you have assistant academics and those precarious workers, but there are two main job families and they're [education] and [research]. There are other kind of teaching fellowships which is only teaching. But [education], which is what I am, [education] is a lecturing post whereby you should spend your time, split your time between pedagogic research and lecturing. So you expect to have a slightly heavier lecturing load than the other job family, which is [research] whereby you spend - you develop research specialism - and you spend your time lecturing as well. Now, my role is a little bit more blurry than this, there isn't... so I'm now the PI on a [learned society] project. So the majority of my time is linked at the moment with admin, followed by research, followed by teaching, because [current institution], down here only have two terms. September to first week of December. And then from January till March. The third term is kind of an open term. So, in my day to day duties, I'll be responsible for - depending on the time of time of year - so currently I would be preparing for exam boards whereby trying to oversee the work submitted by staff and making sure that everything is in place in terms of all the assessments are marked, moderated and information sent to the external examiner. Preparing and looking at student progression stage. So year one, year two, year three, your four because we have some with industry experience, this is the majority of the work happening at the moment. If we were doing term time, I'll be teaching and marking. And I've also got a role as an academic tutor, which is a situation whereby you are allocated a number of students - I've got 16 at the moment. And you've got face to face interaction, or virtual face to face interaction to make sure they're OK, they're supported, that if they have any learning plans, they are receiving support in line with that. And if there is a need for mitigation because of personal circumstance with that. Now the research, interestingly, my job family stipulates that my research should be pedagogic research only, but my background is [discipline]. So I'm working with some colleagues from [current institution] on this, but mostly colleagues in [another country] actually at the moment, on the [topic of research]. And that is linked to the REF. So, those three things. If you want to see, if you want to kind of add a common ground for both [research] and [education], that would be organisational citizenship. It is always expected, but it's quite a nice thing to do. You are expected to contribute to open days, to offer holder engagement sessions, the widening participation events. So that's my other main kind of activity, which is external engagement, if you will. I mean, my favourite is widening participation because it gets me to youngsters who either have disadvantaged backgrounds or the first in their family to try to go to university, to get to speak to them and just try to explain why university is actually cool. It's a good way to go forward.

##### Researcher

OK. Excellent. So you said you're expected to do the pedagogical research. And then you also do the work on [discipline-specific work]. So is that, would you say there is an equal split between those two strands of research?

##### Participant 1

Actually I'd say it's probably about 70/30 in favour of [discipline-specific work]. I'll explain why. At the moment, I'm trying to develop a pedagogic research [group]. At the moment, there doesn't seem to be... so, you may be aware of this, but, for business schools, ABS ranking matters, you know, so you'd find there's very few pedagogic journals that are ranked ABS three. I can't think of many which are ranked ABS four. So, there aren't many colleagues, there aren't many colleagues who do this. I've literally probably a couple of months ago just published my second ever pedagogic piece and that was in an ABS one journal. Just because it was a, it was almost like a [topic of paper]. And that was more of a fun project just because of a conversation with a colleague that went to this. But there isn't an institutional push to develop this. And also, it's not important for [education] progression. Papers, of course, very important, but a number of colleagues do it through engagement, through seminars, which seems to be easier. So they're not particularly keen to publish pedagogically. In fact, I don't know anybody at the moment who is based on my campus who is publishing pedagogic work.

##### Researcher

That's really interesting. So kind of a broad question. But maybe you can pick up on a few things. Why did you become an academic, in your own words?

##### Participant 1

Yeah, no, that's... I have, you know, I've kind of rehearsed this question because I have to rationalise this when I do my widening participation events. And, you know, in many ways, it's a very simple answer. And it's it's a very, it's not a very romantic answer. So, my wife can vouch for this, but I've always been a little bit unhappy with my career up until now. I always felt that there was something missing. And it's a very strange thing because you can be fulfilled day to day and you have a good relationship with colleagues and you're busy. But I think I always felt there's something missing. So, when I was self-employed I didn't miss the security of work. I missed the intellectual engagements. I missed variety. I missed the excitement of doing new things, new tasks every day. And I thought this would come when I became employed and I joined [previous employer] and I worked in [discipline]. And I thought, [discipline], you have different faces, different situations. But it actually wasn't that at all. The majority of the work was very mundane, ordinary and usually about [discipline-specific situations]. And “how do I do this? How do I do that?” I felt very regulated. I didn't have any autonomy. Not even to think. At its worst you're simply relating policy to those who are not aware of policy. So, when I did my master's, I had the opportunity to start to think. I'm not being disrespectful to anybody working in [discipline] or [sector], but I wanted to think in terms of being responsible for creating my own path. And this really appeals to me, this autonomy, this opportunity to learn, to constantly be in a position of being - I mean, this is your classic imposter syndrome - you always feel like there's more, there's more, that somebody would come and rumble you and say you actually don't know what you are talking about. You know, so, you're given a carte blanche to constantly learn and to read. That was one thing. And the other thing was simply opportunity. My institution at the time, [previous employer] had put a moratorium on funded master's programmes. So it was only through me accosting my head of department at the time, in a corridor, and saying, look, I'm really interested, could you please put me on the programme? And then I did well, actually, on an exam in my first year and then the professor I spoke to said actually, how about it, have you thought about it? And then as it happens, there was a scholarship being advertised. So it was a cool kind of sequence of events that created an opportunity. So one is this yearning for autonomy, for learning. And the other was simply being in the right place at the right time.

##### Researcher

Yeah, just sort of fell into place. Stars aligned. Yeah. OK, great. And following on from that. So what do you think the purpose of academia is? That's a big question.

##### Participant 1

You know, Sam, I have to be honest. I've been doing a lot of complaining of late about academia, and I'm not going to subject you to this now, but there hasn't been a meeting with my project team or with other colleagues where I haven't complained about a new development. But in all of this, for me, that's galvanised my idea of what I think academia is. And I don't think academia is there to provide digital content. So, if I can start with the very, kind of critical, critical theory, of course - define it by that which it is not - academia is not about digital content creation. Academia is also not about capturing the largest market share in a newly created pandemic. I think the purpose of academia is to create complete individuals, whether they are at undergraduate or postgraduate level as well as academics themselves. The focus of academia is to stretch and to provide learning opportunities at all levels of experience, not just in terms of academic content, but in terms of learning about ourselves. By exposing us to new situations, by exposing us to new people and new interactions. And, of course, as a correlation, as a result of knowing who you are and being well-versed in the academic area, yes, you may be able to find good employment. Yes, you may be able to contribute to society and hopefully you'll be able to do work that's fulfilling. But that's secondary. I don't know why. You know, the [book]... well, the reason I think I do this is to try to be a better person. Did you ever watch, [researcher’s name], did you ever watch - it's probably before you - there's a program called [television programme].

##### Researcher

Yes, I did. I've seen that. Yes.

##### Participant 1

I just. I didn't mean to. I didn't mean to paraphrase. But it is about that. It's about becoming the Renaissance people, you know, and not in terms of academic and pedagogic knowledge, but in terms of simply being aware of who we are, and aware of what our strengths and weaknesses are and contributing to society in line with those.

##### Researcher

OK. Excellent. Well, thank you for that. I want to move on now and I want to talk more about [current institution] as a kind of university and [the business school]. So, could you summarise the formal requirements that are expected of you in your current role? So this is kind of like not, you know, like teaching and research, like how how you split those up, but more like what you're kind of expected to deliver in like an academic year. So, for example, it would be like, you might be expected to publish a certain amount papers in a year, for example, which is kind of like metrics and stuff, but more like, more like the formal requirements and regulations.

##### Participant 1

That's actually a difficult question because it's almost kind of a two tiered thing. You have the formal requirements which are more specific, but you have the personal development requirements which are discussed after each academic cycle with your manager. So in terms, in terms of formal metrics. Things are currently fluid, as you can imagine, but previously, you had two main things. If you are in an [education] job family, you have to achieve over, so at moment - are you familiar with module evaluation by students?

##### Researcher

Yes. Yes.

##### Participant 1

So in [current institution] the module evaluation is on a scale of one to five. So ever since we've been in an [education] job family, you need to deliver over - we are in the process of looking at it - but it used to be that you have to deliver, if I remember correctly, over [score] on every one of your modules in terms of student satisfaction. Now, that's the business school policy. However, that could be overridden in a personal development review where you can be told "actually, no, we want you to deliver over [score]". But that's a very objective, quantifiable output. If you're teaching, that is what needs to happen in every module. Now, then you also have to demonstrate - again, this is specifically in an [education] job family - you have to deliver some form of external engagement and pedagogic engagement. Now, that's almost kind of hierarchical, although the hierarchy is discussed in your development review. That emanates from a paper, to a conference attendance, to a seminar, to a module, or creating a new module, not simply new content, but maybe a new form of delivery. So we were developing sort of online modules before the pandemic. That kind of stuff. So in terms of pedagogic, know how, expertise, that kind of stuff, delivery... if you are in the [research] job family, the skills are kind of flipped, but you still have to achieve a score over a certain average for your teaching. But you have to develop and deliver three and four star papers. And I believe we need to do this... again, that's developed and agreed individually with each academic. But it's not unheard of for there to be a requirement to have two four star papers as an output. Now, that doesn't have to be a 12 month period because that's not realistic, but it could be a two year or three year period. Typically, it starts with the probation. You've got a 12 or 18 month probation review depending. And by the end of this, you need to have those outputs, and if you don't have those outputs you don't have a job.

##### Researcher

Wow. OK.

##### Participant 1

Now I don't actually know anybody - because we are actually a small team - nobody's lost their job. And I'm not sure whether HR would necessarily formalise no four star paper, no job. But if your own performance and capability... and they ask us directly that... so if you're not able to deliver that, it will be a transition period where you would put on a kind of monitoring and there'll be maybe, you may be assigned a mentor or somebody to help you achieve all of it. But if you don't achieve, ultimately, you'll be managed out of the institution.

##### Researcher

Right. OK. That's tough.

##### Participant 1

It is tough, isn't it? And the insane thing is that it puts loads of pressure on people. And academia hopefully is getting better at looking after students, but I think we're not great at looking after each other and ourselves in terms of staff well-being and what have you. So, yeah. That's a constant source of stress and anxiety for my colleagues.

##### Researcher

Yeah, well, I guess that that's obviously part of the reason why there's been so many strikes recently. Yeah.

##### Participant 1

Absolutely. I mean, in terms of, in terms of security and work, that is also stressful because... now this is not unusual, but typically, if you are - because when I was doing my PhD [at previous institution] I was an associate lecture - as an associate lecturer, you only get paid for delivery. You may have some some kind of allocation. In [current institution] you actually get paid for preparation. I didn't. I didn't. I got paid for face to face delivery. But as you can imagine, doing a presentation requires, you know, you can't just stand up on the day with a slide and just wing it. I mean, some might be able to, but, you know, not all institutions pay you for preparation time. Also, marking. Now, different institutions have different marking models whereby, in [current institution] you get half an hour, I think, half an hour per script. Now, that's OK, unless you're marking dissertations. Obviously if you're marking very intense, you know, [subject] pieces which require, you know, I mean, I've actually just moderated one finalist exam and there were eight pages of calculations. I'm pretty sure that probably will take more, more time to go through every single one to make sure. And then you are expected to stay relevant and upskill yourself and read around this area and keep publishing. But I don't want to, in all of this, to make it all painted as doom and gloom because you are in a community where everybody faces similar challenges. And you find your way to do it. You find a way to do it because yes, sometimes that might mean working Saturday and Sunday and working evenings. But it is doable and it can be done. So, yeah, I don't want to say "oh, actually forget about this, I'm going to go into consulting after this". You know, I do have, I do have colleagues who've done that. I've got a colleague who I work with. Well, he works... his supervisor was [name]. And he's gone into consulting. He created the [output] for organisations. And he thought, "you know what, I've done a year of lecturing, forget about this, I'm going to go into consulting". And he's doing very well.

##### Researcher

Well, you know, I mean, like the phrase, I always think, oh, I could do something else. But then the phrase comes to mind, like "the grass isn't always greener on the other side". You just don't know, do you?

##### Participant 1

I think, yes, I agree completely. I agree completely. But you could, you could do both because now in a number of institutions – [current institution] is the same - you could run your own business in consulting, as well as the academic world. Because it might be that the model that you develop or the output you create is applicable and convertible to engage with people. Maybe it becomes some kind of assessment tool for organisations, or for policy clarity. I mean, if you look at the institutional logics, maybe, it might help to makes sense for things like decision making, knowledge transfer, things that are easily applicable. So you can have two careers, which is also OK.

##### Researcher

Great. So, you mentioned you're kind of expected to do external pedagogical engagement, sort of things like seminars and so on. What other formal deliverables are there related to impact, if any, you can think of?

##### Participant 1

OK. So this is a very fluid terrain at the moment. Because of these kind of things like the REF and KEF. These frameworks that have been introduced make it for very fluid grounds. So at the moment, I've got and I'm aware of instances in [current institution] whereby REF outputs are what drive progression. And pay rises. But in other cases, impact case studies and deliverables along the lines of impact, drive this. And at the moment, to me personally, I have to admit it's not particularly clear which route to take. And this has been raised by academics in the department who think that, you know, what if you have, what if you don't have the four star papers, but you have great impact case studies? Versus if you have zero impact case studies but great papers. And for us at the moment this seems to be done on a case by case basis. And there seems to be no clear top down institutional guidance of "this is the case, if you follow this path", or guidance along the lines of "this is what you're expected to do". The impact theory for me is still a mystery. I still have no idea in which cases impact case studies take precedence, in which case it's papers. Yeah, still a lot to learn it seems for me in this area.

##### Researcher

Right. OK. So you've talked about the requirements and impact, and also your own personal kind of, why you became an academic. Do you feel like the requirements of your job as an academic complement what you wanted to achieve when you went into the career? So you talked about sort of like being unhappy with your previous career and you wanted to have more autonomy, that kind of thing. Is that reflected in the idea that you have to do certain things and the kind of requirements you talked about?

##### Participant 1

This is an absolutely fantastic question because it's a finger on the pulse. So in my first three years of my job, I was the happiest I've been in any position because it was new programme, I was creating modules so I could create modules and kind of put my own, inject my own interests. The module on [subject] became [module title], so I could talk about [theory]. Great. So I created four modules. I, I was having a lot of engagement with doing all the teaching and doing a lot of research, actually, a lot of engagement with colleagues who were trying to push research partnerships. And now I found myself and other colleagues gradually were asked to take on additional admin duties. So specifically the programme directorship, and the management. And [researcher’s name], I find myself in a role very similar as the one I left behind. You're in a very clear management, direct management role. There is rules and regulations. So you have a certain turnaround, you have a turnaround and then you kind of, you know, we have a quick turn around. You have to be monitoring that everybody's marking within a certain deadline. You have to be monitoring timetables. You have to work with colleagues to schedule timetables. You have to work with colleagues to make sure that all the moderation is in place. Before you know it, I moved out and this kind of face to face engagement, which I absolutely love. If I could, I would only do teaching and research; I don't really care for the management side of things. And I don't really care whether it's prestigious or not and I don't really care for any pay rises that come out of it. Because this becomes very bureaucratic. And at the moment, if anything, my role has become more bureaucratic. And it's more of management, overseeing, coordination, because I have to work a lot with the admin support team. So, for example, after this, the meeting is about preparing for the exam review with the external examiner. It's not speaking to students. It's not doing research. It's having a purely admin, bureaucratic function. That has increased exponentially over the past year, and that's when the reason I'm trying to move into teaching and research. Because admin is not why I got into this. And yet I've been doing a lot of admin.

##### Researcher

Right. My screen has just gone black. Can you still hear me?

##### Participant 1

I can hear you. But the image has frozen. But I can, I can still hear. I can still hear.

##### Researcher

Am I back?

##### Participant 1

Not yet. Not yet.

##### Researcher

My screen just went completely black and then it closed. But my camera light is still on. Can you still hear me now?

##### Participant 1

Yeah. I can see you very clearly.

##### Researcher

Oh, OK. Excellent. Right. I will carry on. That's really interesting. Thank you for all of that information. So, obviously there might be a bit of a kind of mismatch between your personal kind of goals, aspirations and then the requirements of the job.

##### Participant 1

Yes.

##### Researcher

Would you say that you have a kind of strategy for managing that?

##### Participant 1

It's another very good question, because this is where you have... I did. So, I did is the short answer. I had, I had a plan. And my plan was to try and do some virtue signalling that I'm an active researcher. I shared a lot of, I shared publications. So, one of the issues that I had, just to give a bit of context to this, is that I went into this role within 12 months of finishing my PhD and my supervisors were not that keen for me to... they weren't that... they didn't have... they didn't share my urgency to publish during my PhD. So I did not have publications. I had things in review, but nothing, nothing concrete. So, the main publications, which, now, I only have [number] three star publications and the others are two star and one star papers. And since then, you know, I have things in the pipeline. But when I approached [current institution] I didn't have publications. That's why I went into the current role. My plan was to try and publish. And move out of this bureaucratic, admin heavy role to get into research.

##### Researcher

Yes.

##### Participant 1

To the point where I actually had an agreement with the head of department. And it's still true. I mean, I've got... education scholarship prose are not included in the REF, but my two publications are part of the REF now, so I don't doubt they'll be evaluated as part of the REF. So my plan was to publish, to get a four star paper, and transition out of this role, into a more research role, while being understanding of all the pressures that would come with this. With all the, all the pressures that would come with this. However, this lockdown has thrown things in the air a little bit, because now, the writing partnerships and the project work on which I relied to get a four star project, four star paper.

##### Researcher

Yeah.

##### Participant 1

They've kind of been paused, and paused for the foreseeable future. So as much as there is still a plan that, you know, and still an agreement with that, if I get a four star paper, yes, I can transition job family. The external situation is such that I don't really have access to participants and that gives me very little access to data to produce this paper. Now, there are things in review, I have a paper in [journal], which is a four star journal. As of today, it's been in review for four months. And that's kind of a lot for [journal]. But again, the external situation seems to have created such a sense of fluidity and complexity that I'm not sure, because, as you said, now the focus is not so much on I mean, on collecting data, but it's more around admin processes, converting content to digital delivery. And things like that now. And this is the period from March until June where I could have really made an impact into my own progress and to make my project work. My writing. Because I can't access data, can't access participants, that's kind of been problematic.

##### Researcher

Right. OK. That's excellent. Thank you. Do you mind if I just very quickly restart Teams because its a bit frozen at the moment, I was gonna see if I can try and fix it.

##### Participant 1

No worries. No worries.

##### Researcher

So sorry about this.

##### Participant 1

That's OK.

##### Researcher

Teams... right, I am going to end it now, so I'll probably leave very quickly and then I'll be back.

##### Participant 1

Yeah, I will let you in. If you, yeah. If you end up in the lobby. I will let you back in.

##### Researcher

Thank you. Thank you.

##### Participant 1

Aha.

##### Researcher

Hello. I can see you again.

##### Participant 1

That was very quick. That was very quick. Very cool.

##### Researcher

The screen just went black and it was all very strange. OK, great. So, I want to move on and talk about something slightly different. So away from kind of, like, the requirements. I wanna wanna talk about the norms. So, you obviously know, can see where I'm going with this. I've talked about regulations, norms, kind of the whole institutional theory thing. So by norms, I mean, not formal requirements, but kind of like implied expectations. So, could you kind of just go over what is expected of you in your role? That isn't a formal requirement, but is more of a professional norm. From, not just from the business school, obviously, but also maybe from the university in general. And also your kind of subject field as well. So what is kind of expected of an academic working in sort of [discipline]?

##### Participant 1

This is a really, really interesting question, because it brings up a bit of a tension.

##### Researcher

OK.

##### Participant 1

So, in terms of, in terms of, regarding the expected output. I'm thinking from this kind of area. Which, which is kind of [discipline], but it has kind of a [theory] kind of slant, which is, you know, through not just the [perspective], but a little bit like that. A little bit. Which comes with a degree of not quite, not quite rogue. But, but a little bit iconoclastic. And the majority of the kind of... so, the majority of the academics in the business school who are working in this dimension and in this kind of field, tend to approach things from a very critical perspective, which is to challenge norms, try and understand the norms and limitations. And that particular perspective is not always seen as particularly interesting or valuable by the business school as a whole. So the norm of kind of research and activism, if you will, is not seen as one which is particularly adding value, at best. At worst - and this is not always expressed institutionally - but it may be regarded as leftist, socialist, activist, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So a number of my colleagues have tried to adapt to this, this tension, the fact that actually their specialism and their expertise and their perspective doesn't become the mainstream one. In fact, it might be shunned by the mainstream one. And they try to move towards institutionally sanctioned activism.

##### Researcher

OK.

##### Participant 1

And that's because... I think [current institution], fairly recently actually, announced an [impact] plan. So, this [theory], this kind of subversive behaviour has then converted to a critique of government policy on, on, [specific agendas], as well as other policies and other criticisms. I think a number of my colleagues, because now [current institution] established their [research centre], which is, which is a collaboration with [charity], that is seen as a good opportunity to leave a mark and to find a niche. So, what I find is, that the institutional norm has been one of adapting to this institutional discourse of [specific agendas]. And a number of us have tried to find a niche and adapt and move away from our interests. So, in some cases, that might be the case of, "oh, I study [discipline], now I'm going to study [discipline] in the [topic related to the research centre]. Oh, I study [discipline], oh, I wonder what that will be like in the [topic related to the research centre]". That kind of stuff. So that's part of that. And my PhD colleague, his PhD is on the [topic related to the research centre], and I joined the project. I could learn new things. And if I don't learn new things, then at least that puts me in a better institutional position than being seen as a as a leftist or as a socialist, which I'm not by any stretch of the imagination. [Topic related to the research centre] doesn't really interest me that much. But if it's an if it's an opportunity, not an excuse, if it's a pretext to study [discipline], then surely the context doesn't matter. So, it's a small, it's a small compromise. That's what we're doing. We're trying to do a small compromise rather than say, "you know what? Let’s abandon our theoretical perspective". And I'll take it. I mean, there's already a, there's already a narrative that business schools and social science are not robust and not doing real science.

##### Researcher

Yeah.

##### Participant 1

So, I'm starting to work with colleagues and do quantitative studies. Because, because even qualitative, Gioia methodology, being as robust as it is and effective in grounded theory, is not as robust as regression, you know. So, that's, that's also a discourse and that's also a theme, in my experience, that if you really want to do well, you know, you should be doing real work. Like, you know, agent based modelling, network analysis. And, whoa, qualitative research? Yeah, alright. That's good.

##### Researcher

Oh, yeah. Yeah. I find that even at [researcher’s institution], [number] percent of the business school PhD students are doing like, heavy quantitative financial modelling and stuff. And then I'm there like... we had our research methods module last year for PhD students and out of my cohort of first years, I was the only one who was actually going to do qualitative work. So I sort of turned up to the qualitative sessions and everyone was like, "I don't know why I'm here". And I was like, “oh, well, I'm excited anyway”.

##### Participant 1

Yeah, but, to be honest. Qualitative work can give such an insight that nothing else can. I mean, the nuance of human experience... you can argue endlessly and yet people are thinking "well, I'm a quants person", you know. I found my research methodology modules in [previous institution] to be not particularly helpful in terms of quants anyway. The kind of quants training that I received, I teach to my second year undergraduates. So universities can do more, I think, to help with this. But in any case there is an argument and we have to work to our strengths, and if a qualitative, in-depth, nuanced ability to grasp those nuances is our strength. Why try and master a skill if really doesn't appeal?

##### Researcher

Mm hmm. Yeah. I'm, I'm very conscious of time. I don't want to make you late for your next meeting. So I will, I will let you go now because I know that you need to be somewhere in two minutes. Would you mind if I did give you a call back later just to finish off a few things? I'm free all day until four.

##### Participant 1

Sure. Because I've got meetings now until half past one. Do you want to do it from, shall we do it from two? Did you want to reschedule to two o'clock?

##### Researcher

Yeah. That's fine.

##### Participant 1

We can finish off. Would that be OK?

##### Researcher

OK, excellent.

##### Participant 1

I can actually probably just move this interview and move it so that is the same link. How about that? And its there again from two o'clock.

##### Researcher

Excellent. Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

##### Participant 1

Oh its a pleasure. And we'll chat again at two.

##### Researcher

Yeah. I'll speak to you at two. Thank you. Good luck with your meeting. Bye bye.

##### Participant 1

Thanks very much. Goodbye.

##### Researcher

OK, excellent. OK, so I just, I was just recapping what we were talking about earlier, so we were talking about some of the kind of norms in the business school and in the university. So you were talking about like the [topic related to the research centre] and sort of the quantitative focus and research and stuff. And you mentioned, I quite like this, institutionally sanctioned activism, I liked that as well. So what I wanted to ask is, do these norms kind of complement your own reasons for joining academia? Do you think? Do you think they kind of go together quite well or not?

##### Participant 1

In a word, no. And I don't think that... so, in many ways, these, these norms are top-down norms, communicated by, or not communicated by, but originating with, from the vision that's been set from the PVC, right at the top of the institution. And it's a strange, strange thing that these norms, they have kind of emerged through practice, both through discourses and through experience and through understandings. The digital, even though we are social distancing, we're very much digitally connected and even more visible, in a way, your world becomes more visible. So I think this would lead to the norms becoming more prominent. I know that they, I wasn't even aware of this, I, even before before starting work in academia, I assumed that it's the pursuit of knowledge that matters and that knowledge, as long as it's robust and objective and it's accumulated in good faith, then that should be that. I was completely, completely oblivious to the politics of academia. Of course, there are personal politics and individual agendas anywhere you go, regardless of which institution, regardless, that will be the case. But I was so, so naive to the fact that actually strong institutional politics can dictate and they can either strengthen teams or they can completely destroy teams. And very, very strangely, this is what I was trying to escape when I left [previous employer]. And now this is where we are in, in a strange déjà vu way, we're still in a very, in a state of flux and shape is taking from above. Because, as I said, it's this... need to quantify work, quantify outputs, need to be monitored, even more so now, and I think increasingly so in a digital, digitally enhanced way. So if anything, I think activism will not be as possible. Even intellectual freedom is being somewhat reduced now. And it's easy to justify, this is incredibly easy to justify, because you might think that as long as you put it in the context of student success... and we are, we're not, we're not enforcing any particular perspective. We're simply ensuring the best for our students. And that means following some perspective, coalescing behind these big staff projects, we help recruitment, et cetera, et cetera. It's very easy to justify this indoctrination of a particular college or department.

##### Researcher

Yeah, yeah. No, I do feel like this stuff is very, sort of resonates very well with like the whole marketisation of higher education. It's becoming like, almost like an industry, and not a kind of, I don't know, a sort of public thing.

##### Participant 1

True, and you know, you could argue and you could, actually the university could justify it because with the removal of government subsidies for the sector, the industry had no choice, no choice, but to become more commercial because really you need income and wages. But at the same time, at the same time, I'm reminded, there is this amazing article about HR, its a very old article, about how HR as a function in an organisation, decided to become more strategic, become more strategic and decided to shed its previous association with workforces, as a mediator, and as such the discipline was treated as strategic. Unfortunately, in doing that, it lost its competitive advantage, it lost that which other functions could not offer - the mediation position. I'm just trying to think. If universities, it doesn't matter if they're former polytechnics, redbrick, what have you, if they start competing with digital companies, with platform universities, with their edX type platforms, I mean, we'll be playing the game on their terms, losing that which is unique - face to face education, open door policy, access, the human side of things - and we will be trying to translate all this into, into an interactive digital content type thing. I think that actually is dangerous for universities who are trying to play this game. I think that's dangerous because universities offer more. So what we're going to do, we're going to reduce who we are, lose our competitive advantage in order to compete with others who simply exist to provide digital content. And that's just folly. So, see, you're absolutely right, in many ways, it's the process has already started and the same thing with our business model, relying on overseas students. Because, because they pay international student fees and that's good for universities, and now we have almost six billion, six, seven billion loss faced by the sector because of the situation, the whole business model is going into question. So universities are thinking, "OK, OK, so since they can't come to us in the UK, I know, we're going to go to them, we're gonna go digital and go to them". So, yeah, it is, it is a vicious cycle thing. And unless academics push back and show that actually the value added is not in 15 minute YouTube style videos, but in the long process of supervision and mentoring, of face to face interaction, of good discussions, providing that is possible, I think the sector will kind of lose something very fundamental to its character and its purpose.

##### Researcher

Yeah, I think the current pandemic has kind of just uncovered how unsustainable the kind of international student reliance is for tuition fees and stuff. I know for my master's program, I was the, I was one of only [number] UK students on the entire programme. And it just showed how reliant [researcher’s institution] is on international student fees, like, and like the emails I've been getting from [management] sending out all these emails and stuff. And it's all very much like doom and gloom. We're not really sure what's going to happen next year and, I don't know, it just seems weird. We're so reliant on one source of income, but that could be so easily taken away by something like this that's going on at the moment.

##### Participant 1

But it's unfair because, because equally that's not what you, or anybody, wants to be hearing at this time when it's really uncertain. I think, yes, it is uncertain, but I think probably a better method - I'm not, this is not a critique of [researcher’s institution], just the sector as a whole - the sector as a whole is either so keen to be reactive, and I know it is the same with us here, "let’s respond, let’s respond quickly". But sometimes it's better to just hit pause and say, OK, we don't know what's happening. So let's not, let's pause assessment deadlines, offer extensions, and make a decision giving us as much information as possible rather than start thinking, as some are doing, "let's get rid of modules" or "let's get rid of staff" or "let's digitize the content". It's just decision making without seeing the big picture and because there's no big picture so far. So, you're right. You're right. With this case, what's the alternative? Communicating doom and gloom and how, I mean, what's the impact that is going to have on staff, on students on scholars? It's not great.

##### Researcher

Mm hmm. Thank you. So, I also wanted to ask you, so you mentioned something earlier, so you have a PhD colleague whose was doing [project].

##### Participant 1

So it's sort of, the stuff he's doing is more on [project specifics].

##### Researcher

Related to [topic related to the research centre]?

##### Participant 1

Related, exactly. He's trying to point out the real, for example - put very, very crudely by me, because I think there's more of a kind of nuance and depth to it - but the idea of [project specifics].

##### Researcher

Yeah. So that, that whole project, that topic is influenced by the fact that [current institution] has such a focus on the [topic related to the research centre], would you say?

##### Participant 1

It wasn't initially, gradually over time. I think, I think actually, if I remember correctly, and I only vaguely remember because we weren't working very closely together, but originally that was a project, that was a [discipline] project. It was around, and, I don't want to make it up, I don't want to guess because I really can't recall, but it was around some technical function of [discipline]. And over time, over time, I started, the term [topic related to the research centre] started creeping up into it. And now it's a project on the [topic related to the research centre], plus [discipline]. So, yeah, even that, even the PhD autonomy such as it is, became subordinate to this kind of normative exercise in the business school.

##### Researcher

That's really interesting. So in a way, it's almost like, I don't want to say compliance, but almost like you kind of have to surrender to those kind of things, don't you?

##### Participant 1

Yes. So, see, in many ways. And again, I don't want to hypothesise why he did it, but it could be a very rational decision. It could be a decision that goes along the lines of, "well, I'm hoping for work, this is an area that seems to be in favour currently, politically and in terms of research impact, so I'm going to align with this". And I know for a fact, I know for a fact, of at least one colleague who has tried to adjust to this new research angle, [topic related to the research centre]. And it's actually broad enough that it makes it possible because, I mean, [topic related to the research centre] is what you make of it. It's a, it's a framework. It's an outlook or it’s a business model. You know, it is. It could be, it could be, and it could be a form of [discipline], if you will. But there still was a joint... we had a, two years ago, a staff meeting, well it wasn't really a meeting, more of a get together away from campus where we tried to discuss a new strategy, how can we all contribute to this new narrative of the [topic related to the research centre]? It was as explicit as that. But it didn't quite happen this way because, the organisation, weird things happen, people left, et cetera, et cetera, but it was was very much a, this is where the organisation is moving. You either join or get left behind.

##### Researcher

Right. Wow. Yeah. So, yeah, there is a lot of kind of pressure then to kind of conform to these ideas, which, which in a way then kind of threatens autonomy and sort of doing maybe what you think is right or what you came to academia for in the first place.

##### Participant 1

It's certainly a compromise. It's certainly a compromise. I suppose it's up to you. where you draw a line. Do you try and say, "I'm going to fully, fully take this on and just follow the institutional line", or "I'm going to try and carve my own niche", and you can rationalize and you can say, "oh, well, I'm not compromising, I'm learning. I'm exploring my my angle and my specialism in a different context". You can say that. But the fact is that you have to now. You don't have to, but... in terms of publication, let’s be very, very pragmatic and very kind of open and transparent. In my little experience of publication, connections matter. So much so that I have been part of a submission process where one of the leading professors here contacted his acquaintances across his network and this particular journal and he alerted them of the submission, said, you know, "we're submitting this, can you please be favourable?" And because we have the [research centre], we have tried to attract some big names in that. So, by working in that area, there is increased chance of working with those big names, for whatever reason, and that improves your standing and improves... so this is partially a compromise, partially reduced autonomy, and partially, partially self-preservation, I'm sorry to say. It's not fully, you know, it's not, it's a strange, it's a, it's more Foucault than Weber, so it's not imposed on you. But you kind of start internalising this, its a case where you accept that this is this is new, the new reality.

##### Researcher

OK, thank you for that. Based on what we've talked about. I want to ask. I'm thinking, that perhaps there's some sort of element of maybe decoupling from what you, almost like you accept that these things are going to happen, and it's kind of like a box ticking exercise. It's like I've got, I need to do these things, so I look in this certain way to the business school and they might not be what I want to do. So kind of like decoupling what you're actually doing from what you maybe want to do. Would you say that, would you say that you ever do things just to kind of tick the box and say, "yeah, I've done it"?

##### Participant 1

It's an interesting suggestion. It's more of a decoupling in terms of perspective. So it's a, it's a trade off between short and long term. So it's almost kind of trying to appease certain requirements, institutional requirements in the short term, so as to continue to move in a particular trajectory, or change trajectory in my case. In other words, trying to demonstrate good citizenship in some way so that in the long term you might be given access to do what you want to do. And having said that, I have had discussions with colleagues who have got there already, so tenured professors, who are very clear that you never get that, that never happens, unless you become professor emeritus when you can do whatever, whatever you want. But even as a professor, as a fully fledged professor, you're still bound by this, at least in [current institution]. So, you still cannot go and say, you know, "I'm a professor, I'm a chair in this particular discipline, and I'm going to publish in this". You still might have to take into account the organisation, whether that particular perspective is deemed worthy or not. So currently in [current institution], [alternative discipline] is not in favour. And we have professors in that, and they know that. If they publish, even if they publish in a four star in that particular, particular area, that will not be seen as worthy as somebody who publishes something around [topic related to the research centre]. Probably a lower level, but in terms of standing and in terms of perceived value. So, yeah, so you do have many moments of decoupling, at the same time you're aware that maybe there never will be a point where you can just publish wherever you want, and I think gradually, gradually, you accept it. You are right in this, I think you accept that this is part of the terrain, the context. And, and that's just part of the job.

##### Researcher

Just life.

##### Participant 1

I think so. I think so. And it starts, you almost shift your expectations and you start thinking more in terms of ,"if I do this, maybe you'll have time to do some research as opposed to having to mark four modules, and teach on four modules", you know, so your perspective changes and you shift your perspective to the point of thinking where some research becomes valuable. You forget about the research that you want to do. If you do your research, you're lucky. You're lucky. Because others cannot even do that. So, yeah, that, that's what it becomes. But it's OK. In a strange way, you don't feel that you have lost out because there are a lot of benefits still to that, you know, there's still a degree of intellectual freedom and there's still time to, for example, to publish. I mean, if you think about this, so if I publish anything two star, the institution doesn't care. So, so I will not be able to say that, that doesn't help. Maybe they will be interested in three star. Maybe they'll be interested, but not that much. Four star is the only thing that matters. That means that you can publish a particular niche perspective in two star and the institution doesn't care. You have to make your own time to do it, but you still have that capacity to do something, to specialise as a hobby away from the institutional norm.

##### Researcher

Is it just, is it just the ABS ranking that they care about then, or do they ever sort of ask for citations or things like that?

##### Participant 1

Maybe around impact. But it's a very strange, the impact is very, very strange. So in theory, in theory, ABS doesn't matter because for REF you'll still be evaluated by a panel of your peers, et cetera. However, now this was with my previous head of department, because we have a new head of department. The previous one is who I had this conversation with. And he said to me that if I get a four star paper, I can get the job I want. It was as simple as that, you know, we had a, we had a number of discussions, you know, "oh, is there precedent in changing job family? Well there is the other way around, research to education. Is there, is there support and mentoring? Yes. Yes. We need to put that in place". And then he said "look, when all is said and done, then that doesn't really matter. You get a four star paper and you can, you can have that because the institution, because that brings, that brings the institution in good repute, it works for REF, and et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So, that's that". Equally, as you know very well, a four star paper is not something you can turn around and produce overnight. So, it's almost kind of like, yeah, of course, have this, have this. And, if you can do it, fine, we're not going to support you towards it, but if you can somehow pull it off. Yeah, we will reap the benefits because we get to, to them it's part of the REF.

##### Researcher

Mm hmm. It's the whole four star paper thing. I do think it makes it, I think it does kind of reinforce the message that anything below that is like, like it's almost like a very sharp, like it's if you get to this stage, then you have not failed. And if you get anything below that, then you have failed. But well, I personally think if I could just get any sort of publications, I would be happy. But, I know that kind of attitude could get beaten out of me as I go along.

##### Participant 1

You know, I hope it doesn't, because, because, you know, who cares about a four star paper with 20 citations, that's read by 20 niche academics, as opposed to... so, my former supervisor who is now retired, he published a two star paper. And this was about was about [topic]. It became the highest cited paper for that month in [journal] or something, I've never heard of it. Highest in terms of, to the point where the paper actually influenced government policy. However, if [current institution] were to look at it, they'll be like, "hold on a second, whoa, hold on a second, is that ABS two, is it? Oh, hmm". And you know, it's ridiculous. And of course, they are, I mean, their journal standards, I mean... Nature, Nature doesn't have an ABS ranking, right? And, another crazy thing I noticed with the team of researchers I was working with on [topic], there is a journal called [journal name], which is an ABS three. And it has an impact factor of [number]. [Another journal] has an impact factor of [lower number] even though it's ABS four. I mean, what about that? Yeah, this is just a ranking, and it does depend, I mean, other institutions would accept it. But an ABS four star paper typically, you should publish it as a PhD, I was told. And yes, I don't have a four star paper. You need a strong name on your publishing team, not as the first author, but a name that is recognised and especially your standing helps if this name has contacts in this journal, so they can make a, if they can influence a favourable review, you know. And I was told, and in fact, I, before I submitted this paper, that's been in review for four months now, one of the colleagues I submitted with - I mean, I submitted it in January, worked on it, on revisions over Christmas - and the professor said to me, you know, "what are you doing? Why did you submit it?" And I was like, "well, because, we finished the work. I mean, I finished the work and it's done. And his words, his words were, "do you not know that submitting a four star paper is not the same as submitting any other paper?" I said, "well, no, I didn't, sorry", and he was like, "no, you can't just submit it". He said, "obviously you could, but if you really want to have a decent change, you need to find somebody who knows, and maybe engage with the editor in advance” and blah, blah, blah, I just thought if this is what science is, you know, contact, networks. I mean, we're back, back to. I don't know. But, publish or perish.

##### Researcher

Yeah.

##### Participant 1

But again, again, I don't want you to... it's not just that... in this case, honestly, I promise as you find, you know, the chase is better than the catch in many ways, because if you can find a group of people, the conversations, begin writing together, it is worthwhile. And if it gets published in a one star, well, so what? It builds your portfolio. It builds your portfolio. Because, there are plenty of people who are not able to publish, they manage just fine, so. It's worth it, it's worth it, and four star, who cares? Some institutions will care. Others won't. There is more than one university in the UK, for now.

##### Researcher

So, yeah, it is interesting that you say publish or perish because that is such a prominent thing in all kind of subjects. But I do feel like it is very prominent in business schools, to be honest. Would you say that, that is almost mutually, would you say that that can go with the idea that we need to make impact, like coming from the REF, they have like the impact studies, impact case studies and stuff. So it's very much like. Right. We actually want to shift focus to impact now and we want to realise how we're making impact. Do you think that that and publish or perish go together or do you think they're kind of mutually exclusive?

##### Participant 1

Interesting. Interesting. Interesting. Let me think, let me think. Let me think out loud. So, unfortunately, the publish or perish, it actually is not entirely correct. I think they're not mutually exclusive in as much as, its impact. Now impact can take various forms. And impact can be REF impact, you know, impact case studies. Could be, it could be impact by it, just as an example, we had a member of staff at [current institution] who brought in, or connected, with [charity] because he actually, with [charity founder] themself, and he brought them across to several engagement sessions at [current institution] and the centre opened. And the institutional impact of this was such that even though this person is not actually publishing in four star journals, he is publishing, I mean, recently, he had a three star paper, you know, publishing [paper types]. But, winning big grants, big developmental grants, so in that sense, I think that publish or perish is about the individual. But that is very much depending on publishing in a good journal, or perish. Because, again, I have a colleague. Who has been trying to achieve the next stage of progression. And in terms of publications. Solid, consistent. Mostly two, maybe a three star. But huge impact case studies. And to the point that they're told, "sorry, not good enough, you need a paper in order to really demonstrate intellectual contribution". Others, also lacking four star papers, but again, able to progress through impact. A third person that I can think of, well, I mean, that's, I don't know anybody else like this. She has two four star papers. So, in [journal] and, actually, a [different discipline] style contribution... not [journal], because I think if it was [journal] then I think actually they would have a throne rather than a chair, you know, something like that. But because they take this [alternative perspective], always they are saying "yeah, I'm not very good". So, I think it's probably neither nor. It's, it's what the institution says, what the institution determines as useful. And for [current institution], I guess, it was useful to have contacts in the [topic related to the research centre] side, so. The contribution of that particular person became more prominent and more valued. So it's, it's a shaky terrain, absolutely. The stupid thing is, now, actually, I've got some senior colleagues who are in [education] who don't necessarily publish. I mean publish or perish, that counts conferences as well. And in certain job families that counts completely. You know, actually, last year I went for an interview to [teaching-focused institution].

##### Researcher

Oh yeah.

##### Participant 1

And, you know, which is, which is fine. I've got former colleagues who moved there. Fantastic team who interviewed me, I didn't, I didn't get offered the job, I didn't have enough experience of postgraduate teaching. For them, it was like, you know, yeah we do research, but we teach huge, huge cohorts, so. When I looked at the profiles before that, I mean, their publication profile was conferences. And that was deemed, for their institution, perfectly fine, so I guess it's still a moveable feast when it comes to what that actually means, but it's fun. It's fun. Otherwise, you know, if you're working on your own stuff, I think, it helps, it helps your, or our, relevance as academics seem clear. We are testing our perspective, our ability of being an analytical tool kit, et cetera. So, it helps, and it's fun, most, most of all. So I think that's why, I think that's why people still do it. Otherwise in institutions like this one, otherwise, I think "if I can't publish four star, what's the point? Why? Why not have an evening having a glass of something, you know, and having fun rather than writing up a revision of a paper?"

##### Researcher

Yeah.

##### Participant 1

You know. You know, so. Yeah. So it's a strange one, publish or perish, it is open to interpretation, open to institutional interpretation.

##### Researcher

OK, excellent. OK, thank you for that. I think we're pretty much there. I don't want to sort of, hammer you with loads more questions. Maybe just one final one. Just kind of like a summary. If you could kind of just maybe summarise like in your daily day to day activities and working life, how would you say do you kind of navigate these different demands that you have and in different areas of your job? Like how, could you kind of summarise how, how you actually go about that?

##### Participant 1

Oh, it's, it's a, it's an excellent question. I think your grasp, your grasp of academia and the nature of academia is, is very, very good indeed. So, this is, so I had a colleague who asked this of our [senior leader] at a meeting, actually asked "if we've got the knowledge excellence framework being introduced, teaching excellence framework, research excellence framework, how do I decide which to dedicate my time against? Or, how do I split my time over all three matters?" And the response he got was something along the lines of, "well yeah, we mean, we hope that our staff are T-shaped staff". So, you know, broad-brush specialists. In other words, well, keep firing at them all and whichever one works for you and whichever door opens, stick with that. And me? It's, it's a process of, how can I put it, it's a process of... so, there's a French philosopher and critical theorist called Henri Lefebvre, and he talks a lot about rhythms. And he talks about the rhythms of life and, you know, how a place changes when its at it's busiest time and how it looks after hours. But I try and operate in terms of rhythms. During term time, I will give priority to, I'll be very reactive. So during term time, I don't have to be, I let the river push me in a direction, you know, responding to student emails, responding to student queries, marking, teaching. It's easy. It's actually very, very regimented. And that makes things very easy. The difficult time, and the time that really requires navigation, is outside of term time. Because you feel this pressure to get ahead, to upskill, the try and do some writing, to do some more reading. But also, it is a, it's a, tension, because it's also an admin time. This is when, as I said, you know, you're looking at sending out the exams, exam students, moderating, preparing things for the external examiner. So this is really the time where you have to try and... I tend to try and be as sensible, in as much as, I try to be responding to queries, but I use my initiative to, to focus on writing and on research. So, it's about keeping an eye on the flow of emails and queries and trying to respond to things as they come and using the rest of the time for your own development. And that's what I do. So during term time, I'm completely led by things, I'm very reactive. And now is the time where it's harder because I'm trying to reach out and do some work and, kind of, I'm switching and kind of trying to do the bare minimum as much as I can in terms of admin and bureaucratic requirements. And the rest I spend on self development because the bureaucratic element doesn't lead to promotion. It doesn't lead to any kind of improvement. It doesn't give me any value. It doesn't give students any value, because even on the research side I have new data to share with the students, so. So, it's a case of gradually trying to work out what you can do and adjusting, constantly adjusting. Last year was much easier because I was on campus, I had a number of co-writers and, you know, we did, we did a lot of work. Now everybody's kind of become more insular. So it's much more difficult, again, to evaluate and try and, try and find a path, but it's a, a gradual process. It is an emergent process, and it's a process that changes daily, so. I don't think I have the ultimate, the ultimate answer for this one. It's a, time dependent, period dependent, and, and it still requires just a day to day, still taking things on a very day by day basis.

##### Researcher

OK, well, thank you for your honesty and everything. I really appreciate it. I won't ask you any more questions. That'll be it for now.