##### Researcher

Okay. So obviously I've had a look at your profile, so I've read a bit about you, but kind of in your own words, can you tell me about yourself and your career?

##### Participant 15

OK. Do you want the career history?

##### Researcher

Yeah, that'd be good.

##### Participant 15

OK. Very briefly, I started at [previous institution] in [year]. The key point being I worked in the [research unit] which was one of four units which was set up by the, what was known then, as [research council]. And we were all employees of the [research council]. So we were kind of at [previous institution] but not in [previous institution] if you see what I mean. That lasted until [year] when the [research council] didn't want to employ people anymore. We were then absorbed into the university. I carried on at that unit, basically paid to do research, administration around research, until [year] when the period of funding stopped and then moved, you know, normally into the business school. During that time I, most of us, were also involved in teaching in various ways. Mostly postgraduate students. Became [position] in [year]. Stayed in [previous institution] doing various admin and senior leadership roles until [year]. I then had a significant falling out with the dean and therefore left to [current institution] and I was [senior leader role] for two and a half, three years at [current institution].

##### Researcher

Right, OK. And so what sort of involvement do you have at the moment with [current institution]?

##### Participant 15

I give advice to former colleagues here and there, quite a few universities have paid me money to advise them on their REF submissions. My main academic role is with a colleague called [name] who is at [another university]. And we've worked together as colleagues for the past 20-odd years. He was a [current institution] for a time.

##### Researcher

And so your kind of background, so you did a PhD in [alternative discipline], is that right?

##### Participant 15

Correct.

##### Researcher

So how did you kind of get into the business environment coming from that [alternative] background?

##### Participant 15

Like many people do. It's often said that a large number of [alternative discipline academics] are in business schools. Certainly, if you want to do [topic] you'll find it in business schools. And not in [alternative discipline] departments, with a few exceptions. So, how did this happen? I read [another alternative subject], and certainly I started falling out with the subject about the second year, partly because I didn't really understand some of it, and when I did understand it, I didn't really approve of it. So I slithered into [PhD discipline]. I got enthused by [topic], to such a degree that I would happily turn up at lectures at 9 o'clock on a Saturday morning. That got me more and more interested in [subject] and those sort of things. I went to [different university] and did, actually, a very good degree that doesn't exist anymore, a two year, basically it was like a two year MA really, in [subject] which was luxury. There were six of us being taught by all the stars. And of course with that I got interested in [topics] and so I did a DPhil on that. And then I applied for a job at [previous institution].

##### Researcher

Okay, interesting. And so why did you kind of pursue a career in academia? What was your kind of motivation for that?

##### Participant 15

Two elements really. One was, I couldn't get any jobs anywhere else. I applied for various managerial jobs, some of which I might've got, I recall doing some computer aptitude tests for, I think it was [organisation]. I remember doing quite well in that, and thinking I could do that, but I didn't really fancy that. I nearly took a job as a research officer for an obscure organisation that no longer exists anymore, [organisation]. I decided against those things. And I always sort of had academic interests. So I was pursuing two courses, really, well three. Real jobs, lecturing jobs in [PhD discipline] or lecturing jobs in [chosen discipline]. Lecturing in [PhD discipline] at the time, didn't really appreciate what I did. And [previous institution] came up and I grabbed it with both hands, because [previous institution] was the place to do [discipline], still is really in my opinion.

##### Researcher

Lovely. And kind of throughout your career, it probably changed from time to time, but can you share how much time you were dedicating to research, teaching, admin, those kind of different elements?

##### Participant 15

I'm very unusual, working full time in a research unit. That's what we were paid to do. I never calculated the time, but certainly from [year] to [year], I was supposedly full-time dedicated to research and administering it. Not just doing your own research, but helping develop research programmes, becoming [role] in year - so managing staff, managing relationships with the business, all that sort of thing. At various times dealing with the men in grey suits and so on.

##### Researcher

Okay.

##### Participant 15

Slowly began starting doing teaching, supervised my first PhD student in the 1980s. And I taught for many years on the [programme] which is now non-existent. And then from the mid 1990s began moving into more central teaching roles in the business school. And the interesting thing which the [previous business school] was doing in the 1990s, they wanted a capstone module for final year students, which put together all their skills in all the bits they'd done in marketing, accounting and so on. And it was called [name of module]. And the idea was to bring together research people and the many academics, and expose students to up-to-the-minute research on topics of interest. So I got involved in that module. I ran it for 2 or 3 years and it was a very interesting task, to work with students in that way. Basically giving them real life problems with no clear solutions. They worked in groups, and we saw what kind of answers they came up with. And actually, teaching that helped me with some writing I did. The book I did with [co-author] in [year] called [name of book] was heavily shaped by what I did on that module because I learnt a lot about various things like marketing, accounting, risk assessment, which I didn't know much about.

##### Researcher

And do you generally quite enjoy the teaching side of the job?

##### Participant 15

Yes. There are downsides. Marking can be a pain. But yes, challenging dealing with students, challenging dealing with that module, because it was deliberately throwing stuff at students that got them out of their comfort zone. And a lot of them didn't like it. That, that was an interesting challenge, took me the first two or three years to persuade them why it worked. We then got some useful feedback from students, saying "I didn't like thus module when I took it, but when I went for my job interview, it was critical because that's what they're looking for". What employers want is somebody who can think on their feet, and that reads books, and that kind of thing.

##### Researcher

OK, lovely. And so obviously being sort of in the business school setting from obviously [decade] up until this kind of this decade, what what would you say are the main kind of changes in business schools from when you started to now?

##### Participant 15

Okay well, I can talk mainly about [previous institution]. The main thing in many business schools was they were delving into research for the first time. It's a surprising thing, and we take it for granted now with the REF, that we are driven by research, at that time we weren't. Lots of business schools didn't really do any. Or, some of the research that was done was very practical oriented stuff, helping firms with their accounting problems, rather than academic and scholarly research. So in the 70s and 80s there suddenly was a tension between the people who did pure research, like me, and the people who taught students. The other point at the time was - what are business schools? [Previous business school] for many years was called [alternative title]. And it became the business school somewhere in the [decade]. And there was a significant dispute about that. And the then dean wrote a [piece] about this, essentially saying that business schools are pluralist, meaning they embrace lots of different perspectives, which is what I'll come onto in a minute, from, if you like, a functional accounting person right through to critical management people, as it later became known. At the time there was a big tension, and that's now gone I think, we just take a business school as a business school. We're not worried about what it is called. Some people still dispute it. So that's what was happening into the 80s, the 90s, and then slowly a more academic approach started emerging. And from the 2000s a number of places have started aping the American business school model which is highly demanding on colleagues, very high hurdles to get tenure. A very demanding regime. And also, of course, people at those American business schools get paid substantially more than anyone else. I mean, twice, three times what people get paid elsewhere. And since the last 10, 15 years places like [business schools] have tried to become more like an American business school in their management process. They no longer happily recruit their own PhD students into jobs, they pretty much say you've got to have three or four top level papers before they'll even recruit you as a junior lecturer, and so on. One issue in business schools always is the tension between being able to recruit really high calibre staff, and the fact that business schools are essential to universities for the student numbers they generates. I have some figures somewhere, something like one in four undergraduates in Britain studies business, some sort of percentage like that. So they need to be able to do the teaching. You get those tensions all the time when you're recruiting. You need someone who can stand up in front of students, particularly MBA students who are very, very demanding. You need people with the credibility to do that and do research at the same time. And there aren't many of those. Those who could do that are much in demand, and therefore they go to the leading institutions. Therefore, there is always a tension between people who can do research and managing the teaching function. And effectively, the difference between the supply and demand of people who can do this. A lot of business school staff are not, will not, probably should not be producing a lot of high level publications. They can't be, because there are thousands and thousands of colleagues in business schools and you need people who can do the stuff with the students. A solution in many places is distinction between people who do research and people who don't do research. [University] has this terrible phrase of a "three legged contract" or "two legged contract". And lots of places do that now. So although you say some business schools are leading research business schools, behind that there are all kinds of associate faculty and the like, who are not actually active researchers.

##### Researcher

Okay, that's all really interesting. So you mentioned that you were quite well involved with the REF in 2014. Am I right in thinking that before that it was the research assessment exercise?

##### Participant 15

Correct. The RAE began in the 1980s. Why was it invented? Interestingly, it was invented by the man who is in charge of what was called the university grants committee, I think it was called. And he had the bright idea of saying "well, how do we justify giving all this public money to universities for research without any measure of if they're any good or not?" And I think he anticipated somebody coming along and saying "so how do we know Oxford are any good at research?" So he invented the RAE as it was then called, as a light touch system, not really to police universities, but to persuade the government that there was a process in place to decide why you should give money to Oxford or whoever it's going to be. So the RAE slowly evolved and became more of an industry. Until about 2000 it was pretty light touch. I remember the one in 96, I think, where someone said to me "what are your best papers?" And I said "well, I'll show you a range - I'll give you a book, an academic article, and I'll give you a piece in a popular management journal", because that shows a range of what you do. Now of course it has to be four star journals. And it got tougher. Big issue in [previous institution], in [year] it lost what was it's so-called "five star rating". But we won it back in [year]. So in [year] there were three business schools which were top of the league. In those days it was called five star A, meaning your quality was top and also you put in a high percentage of staff. Those three were [names of business schools] and the RAE has slowly evolved from that.

##### Researcher

Okay, great. And so the REF obviously has the kind of impact element to it with obviously the inclusion of impact case studies. Did the RAE have the same kind of focus on impact that the REF has?

##### Participant 15

No. Scarcely. Impact was an invention. Many people were sketchy about it at the time, including me. I think it definitely works, works surprisingly well. The RAE started off, as I say, as a very light touch. My recollection, I think it was sometime in the 80s, each department gave it's five top papers or something like that. That's what it was. Then it emerged later into a much more bureaucratic process, paper-driven. And there is a picture of [previous institution]'s RAE submission, in [year] I think, with a professor who is in charge of the submission standing in front of it. And it was a stack of paper taller than him. And this is pre-electronic days. You have to put in hard copies of all your stuff, and so you'd have an enormous pile of paper. It was driven by essentially reading outputs and some qualitative judgments about the environment of the place, often what was called the "esteem" of the place. How many committees are you on, how many advisors to the government have you got, this kind of thing. This theme has slowly evolved into what's now called a contribution to discipline, an environment template. Impact, we can talk about that in detail. Impact is very much a particular thing in the REF, of course. It's not just about engagement, it's showing a very particular process from a piece of research to a piece of output. I think impact was sort of defined like, not to change anything, but I think it was to improve... I think the words were "improve the quality of information and understanding available to practitioners", namely, in that context, trade unions, employers associations and government. It was helping people to think about the world, understand what they're doing better, raise some critical questions maybe, but it didn't say that the job is to go and help firms improve their productivity.

##### Researcher

That's really interesting. And in terms of, obviously, I guess you kind of draw on [previous and current institutions] here, but does the kind of attitude of the business school kind of reflect that impact requirement? Do you think that is a priority for business schools?

##### Participant 15

Yes it is, most places take it very seriously. [Current institution] had, and I think [previous institution] had, impact leads at school level. And also at university level to help people with the process. Various universities are asking me as an outsider to look at their impact cases, so again, that's another check if you like about whether it's working or not. So people will ask questions like "does the underpinning research meet the requirements? Is there a clear narrative between the research and the outcomes? Do the outcomes have reach and significance?" And so on. So, yes, it is taken seriously. Some universities give people time to do impact cases, there are impact acceleration grants and so on. And the way it is weighted, an impact, last time round an impact case was worth numerous outputs. So in other words, if you do so moderately average research but have a good impact case, that means you're worth three or four people who have got four 4 star papers. And not many people have four 4 star papers. Certainly from 2014, very few people did that. Which is good because it does make business schools broader and more pluralistic than they used to be, because, if you do research as impact, even though it has not been published in the top journals, that still makes you a worthy person. Whereas in the past we were not, sometimes to an extreme degree. I recall a colleague at [previous institution] who was not research active at all, in the finance group, and he was a phenomenally good teacher, still is I think. And he got 4.95 out of five ratings. But his colleagues tended to treat him as useless because he didn't do research. It was entirely unreasonable. If we go back to pluralism, so, the group I worked with at [previous institution], we had a pretty good collegial view about what people did. And we had various colleagues who weren't really doing much research, but they were picking up the pieces and when we had to go and teach MBA courses we didn't want to go and teach, they would do it. Literally, we had this dreadful thing at [previous institution] at one time, a tailored MBA for [stakeholder group] and people had to go off to [foreign city] at the weekend to teach courses and that kind of stuff. We had colleagues who would do that, and if you like, pick up those pieces, so the rest of us could do research. And that was a collegial environment which worked. And some business schools, [previous institution] included, stopped doing that and became much more aggressive and essentially said "everyone has to do everything at all times". And that's the reason I left [previous institution]. And several colleagues of mine, tough people, tough cookies, some of them worked for [organisations], they'd been around, they knew the real world and even they had been put in a serious and demonstrable mental stress by the requirement to say you've got to be excellent at teaching and excellent at research and excellent at impact, next to everything else, at all times. It's just not reasonable. And a sensible business school doesn't do that.

##### Researcher

So, would a sensible business school maybe focus on one or two of those areas?

##### Participant 15

Well, it would have a reasonable set of goals. I was asked a couple of years ago by a business school to be an external member on a university review about the future of the school. And it was a small to medium sized school doing a perfectly decent job, nothing wrong with it, with some very clear niches in research. So the two externals said "keep doing more of that, keep up the fact that people like working here, people stay, and you'll do a decent job". When the report came out, it said the business school should have 20 targets to do this and do that and be the top ten in this and all the rest of it. Which is just nonsense, it's just unrealistic. We can't all be the best business school, nor should we be. And the problem is that sometimes universities put too much pressure on business schools to deliver, both as cash cows, but also as leaders of academic debate. And universities need to to be clearer about what we're doing. And if they say "yeah, this is a cash cow", then they need to live with the consequences. You can't also be a leader in research terms.

##### Researcher

So obviously there's all these kind of responsibilities then that business academics have in their job roles. What do you think is like the most important thing that business academics have to do in order to kind of advance in their careers? What is the one thing that you think should be prioritised?

##### Participant 15

The main thing is to be clear what it is they're doing. Otherwise they'll be pulled in all directions and won't do anything very well. I recall at [current institution] when I took semi retirement and spent time doing staff mentoring in effect, I recall working with a colleague who did a very practical, sort of [discipline] sort of stuff. And talking with him and saying "look, you could really do impact stuff if you wanted to, working with companies and helping them improve their operating procedures". And we talked about it and we said think about it. And he came back a month later as agreed and he said "no, actually, what I want to do, I want to do pure teaching, traditional research, and administration, that's what drives me, I could probably do this impact stuff but it doesn't really do it for me". And in my view that's an admirable decision to reach. So, well I used to say on, you know, appointing committees and promotion committees, is "we need to understand what somebody is and not expect them to jump through all the hoops at the same time". And it's sometimes hard to hold that line when people are saying "we're looking for everything". I think it is important to maintain that. If you look at, it's probably public, if you look at [researcher's institution] promotion procedure for professors, it's probably about five pages of criteria. And no-one is going to meet all the criteria. So it's important for universities to understand no-one is going to meet that and to evaluate people appropriately, and to look at each individual and see what they can do. So, they are satisficing on some things and really leading on others as individuals. And then, in terms of your group, you say, well, we've got some people who can do this, some people who can do that, and as long as you've got a reasonable balance, as I was saying earlier, it will work.

##### Researcher

And, from, obviously you mentioned the fact that business schools when they very first started, they weren't really doing research, and then now we find ourselves in the position where emphasis is put on the ABS list and three star, four star publications. How has that sort of come about? Why are publications so key?

##### Participant 15

Because they're easy to measure. And the ABS is an easy measurement list for deans. And there's a sentence in the subpanels of REF 2014, saying, it says something like, "there was a range of quality profiles across a range of journals" or something like that. What that meant was that after the REF several of us sat down and said "right, here's how we rated all of our papers, here's the ABS list, what's the correlation like?" And the answer is, there is a correlation, obviously, but it was far from strong. If you've got a paper in a four star journal, you had a 50% chance of it being four star rated in REF terms, and therefore a 50% chance of it not. So it's a correlation but it's not 90% by any means. But the ABS list is a simple tool for busy deans to use. And you can understand why, because business schools are so complicated. Any business school has people at one end doing hardened finance which is basically applied maths of a kind, they often have people doing operations management which is another sort of hard subject, which I certainly don't understand, and it's got softer subjects and postmodernists at the other, and everything in between. So, no-one can understand all of that. So, so, you can see why the ABS list is used as an indicator. Which is fine on a collective level. But it doesn't work on the individual level. What I tend to say on a promotion committee and the like is that you need to be able to show what - if we're looking for somebody to be a professor - you need to show you can hit these top journals some of the time, but not necessarily all the time. And again, it's hard to hold that line. So it's what is measurable, it's not just business schools that do this thing, any large department will tend to do the same. It works differently in different fields. I sat for a time as, in [current institution], on a science department promotion committee, as one of the outsiders from another department. And there, obviously research grants are a key thing in [those subjects] and papers, but also impact. Business schools are still not entirely driven by research income which is sensible. The key thing there is, [current institution] has a good phrase which is, I think, "you have secured the means to do your research", right? So if you do astronomy, you've got to get research grants to go and use telescopes. If you do philosophy, you probably don't need anything, a few pounds here and there to go to the odd conference or a library or something. So as long as you hold that line in the business school, if you have the means to do the research that you do and people understand what the research is, then that's good enough.

##### Researcher

Okay. And you mentioned being on promotion committees and obviously throughout your career you would have been promoted yourself and you would've had appraisals and things like that. In those kind of processes, are there things that you kind of absolutely have to achieve that kind of like written down and kind of acknowledged in that way, or are the expectations more kind of normative, kind of unwritten?

##### Participant 15

They are written down, increasingly so. It used to be much more vague and normative. People used to get promoted because they were known, and in Oxbridge terms you were a "good chap" and all of that. Now, it's very formal and you have to tick the boxes. And people's CVs reflect this. So again, coming back to the [hard science subject] people, there are various boxes you have to tick like PhD supervision. So, for someone's CV they say "yeah, here are the PhDs I took on, here's where they were itemised". My CV says I supervised, I don't know, a number of PhDs, I can't remember, nobody cared how many there were when I was being promoted. So it's become much more formalised, much more standardised, probably better in a sense. Still remarkably opaque in detail. I used to use [previous institution's] appraisal scheme as an example of how not to do it. Essentially, what it ended up with was, you wrote a couple of pages and gave it to your head of department, basically saying what you've done in the last year, what papers you've published, teaching, grants, and so on. And you sent that in, it was supposedly evaluated on a five point scale, and that was then moderated at the level of the faculty, and then it went to the university. So you might imagine that someone would come back to you and say, "oh yeah, I see you're doing quite a lot on the research but we'd really like you to get some more grants", or "what about more international links?" Something along those lines. Nothing. Essentially I would write my two pages in about May, and then one day in August, I'd get a letter from the university saying "this is what we're going to pay you next year". Simple as that. And you can do the arithmetic and it would tell you what your pay increase was and what the average was. So if could you do the arithmetic, you could say, oh look, they are paying me 1% more and they're paying the average 2% more. Therefore, they don't think much of me, or whatever it might be. But that's pure inference. And never any kind of feedback of any sort. And it's still like that. It's a thing I say all the time to the university - you've got these appraisal schemes, used them properly. You sat down with somebody and you evaluated them supposedly, what you then need to do is go back and have a serious conversation about what they're doing. See, what I was brought up with, going back to my early days in research units, you sat down every year with the director office who would go through what you've done, what they wanted you to do next, and you were asked the classic question "where do you want to be in five years time?" And you would give the answer and they would say "right, well how are we going to get you from where you are now, to there?" So, you need more teaching experience, or you need to get out more and go to more international conferences, or whatever it might be. But that kind of approach in my experience has been, remarkably, quite a rarity.

##### Researcher

Okay. And so in terms of your kind of, career, you've had a very long fruitful career and you obviously are a very kind of successful academic, but as you kind of said, there are lots of different requirements, different aspects of the job that are all very important. How have you kind of navigated your career to get to where you obviously have ended up?

##### Participant 15

I guess I've been fortunate because of my start on the research front. If you get a research career going, you get a pipeline of papers, and then you kind of pick up the teaching as you go along. That said, I had numerous colleagues in the research unit who never did that. Lots of people had the opportunities and never quite took it. So, it is a matter of being focused in terms of what you're trying to do and having clear objectives to get things done. A bit like a production line. Not being distracted. I had a colleague who was notorious for being a really good colleague, really nice to students, never published anything. Why not? Well, partly because he was too busy with students, partly because he'd always find something else to go and read, and partly because of a bit of self-doubt, saying "well, if I'm writing any of this does it really matter?" He went to [previous institution] from [another institution], where famously the head of department pretty well said "I'm going to lock you the room for a fortnight and you're going to come out with some papers!" It is about being focused, having goals. I found it very useful working with colleagues in research units, a lot of my work has been in teams and that means there is a certain group discipline. Unlike the independence, isolation, possible loneliness for a PhD student. And you pick it up from, I guess you pick it up from the environment. You have your mentors. I was fortunate in [previous institution] and indeed with my PhD supervisors, in that they were all very focused on what you're doing and making sure that things keep on track. And my supervisor's approach to supervision was you go along with a chapter and we go through it, take it apart, he'd say "OK, that's fine, where's the next one?" Right, two weeks time we'll have the next one. And it was a very, very process-driven approach which worked fine. Likewise at [previous institution], the people who led that were very collegial, very supportive, but also very clear that you were having to produce stuff. What the stuff was varied. In those days it was books. The expectation was that you had a team of people, two, three or four people, you work on a big topic for three or four years, out of which would come at least one substantial book. And if you didn't do that, you left. And although we were always very successful, there were several people who just didn't do that, they didn't have that discipline, and they just drifted away. All of that's fine, what's notable now about colleagues in business schools now, is they have to juggle much greater pressures than I did. In terms of, well, everything you can think of. There was no National Student Survey, for example. There are now similar student surveys for postgraduate students. PhD supervision was loose, shall we say, and compared to, I'm sure what you go through now with annual reviews and multiple supervisors, moderators and all of that. Yeah, when I started in the [time period] PhD supervision was pretty much "there's a supervisor, there's a library, get on with it, come back in three or four years time". Quite literally! Now you have to manage your PhD students in a disciplined way, you need to be trained in it, you have to do your undergraduate teaching to a level, and you've got lots of satisfaction measures to meet. You need to do research to a much more explicit level than I did and you've got to do impact. So it's a very demanding job for those joining business schools now.

##### Researcher

And I wonder, kind of if you have any kind of perspective on, obviously, the pandemic at the moment has kind of forced many, many academic staff to really focus on teaching, because obviously that's kind of like the gold command thing at the moment in terms of delivering online teaching, and I've spoken to some people who have said that their research allowance has actually been cut quite a lot because they need to prioritise students. Do you think this is something that is going to change the field?

##### Participant 15

Short term, it has. At [current institution] I think research allowances have been reduced, if not - don't quote me on this - probably eliminated. I don't follow this anymore, but what I hear is research time has been reduced to virtually zero in lots of places. Short term, we can live with that. It also depends on what sort of research you do. If you do economics, you can probably do it online anyway, because it's doing surveys and the like. The kind of research I do, which involves going out and talking to people, is very hard to do. If not impossible. If you do ethnography, anthropologists and so on, it's become virtually impossible to do what they do. So this period of time could have significant effects on how research gets done and what research gets done. And you would imagine it would be more focused on the sort of stuff you can do from your desk. Literature reviews, analysis of existing surveys, and that kind of thing.

##### Researcher

Okay. I think that's, I've covered all of my questions really. I think that's probably everything I wanted to ask. Unless there's anything else on your mind that you think is important to say.

##### Participant 15

If that's answered what you need to know.

##### Researcher

Yeah, definitely, it's been very interesting.

##### Participant 15

Alright. Okay. I don't know how you're doing this, but feel free to come back to fill in some gaps, or, quite often with interview research things emerge and new topics emerge, and you think "oh, I wish I asked that person this question". So, if you want to come back some time, follow up, you're very welcome.

##### Researcher

Ok. Thank you very much for that offer. I'll definitely keep that in mind.