##### Researcher

Okay, great. So obviously I've had a look at your profile, but kind of in your own words, can you just tell me about yourself, your background, your kind of career to date and your current role, please?

##### Participant 29

Yeah, depends how far you want to go back. But I suppose it's relevant that I was than an undergraduate at [undergraduate university] business school where I was taught by people like [academics]. This is kind of like, I guess you might know [undergraduate university] is famous for what they call [discipline]. So it's got a kind of a bit of a tradition behind it. And [academics] were a very important pair in terms of the opening up of [discipline] into what would in some people's eyes would become [subject area]. So there's quite an important, [undergraduate university] was quite an important centre for that opening up of [discipline] in that way. And I guess opening the way for a whole proliferation of critical studies of management. I mean, I think [university] was very important in that. So that was where I started out and I didn't start out with an intention to be an academic, but particularly [academic]'s influence as a teacher really kind of blew my mind in terms of ideas, the more philosophical end of things. And I did a bit of travel around that time which really, they really played off one another and so I decided to go into postgraduate study. But because of the kind of ideas I was into I didn't go for a business school postgraduate. I went to [master's university] and went into [alternative discipline] which was kind of very theory heavy, with a lot of, basically I was the only person from a business school background. So, lots of people from more arts, literature, whatever. And it's a fantastic, I don't know if you know [master's university] but it's a fantastic campus for all of those sorts of artsy, humanities, and I guess interdisciplinary kind of cross pollination. So I did a master's there and got funded for that, which was great. And basically I started making plans for a PhD. I had a couple of unsuccessful PhD funding applications and decided to do a self funded research master's at [master's university] in [subject] with a view to [research council] award. So do the research training bit myself and then make myself available for the PhD. And at the end of that I actually got two funding awards. One would have been [master's university] and I would have carried on there, and one was a full studentship back at [undergraduate university]. So I had a big decision to make as to whether I was going to go back into the business school. And I was mainly influenced by the opportunity to be supervised by [academic]. So I went back to the business school. And so I've been in business and management studies ever since. And then I got the job at [current institution] in [year] while I still, I still hadn't completed my PhD. So basically I had two more years where I was finishing up my PhD at [current institution]. And so yeah, it was six years in total to get the PhD finished. And then yeah, I have been at [current institution] ever since.

##### Researcher

Okay. That's really interesting. Thank you. And for your undergraduate, was it just like a straight kind of [business] degree? Was that what you did?

##### Participant 29

Yeah, it was a management degree. And it was kind of appealing to me as a degree because it had a mix of the social sciences there. You know, I was kind of like, I went to a school which was a private school, which was very Oxbridge and, you know, it was very sort of like, geared towards particular subject areas. But actually, I kind of knew I had a sort of more general interest in the social sciences but I didn't really want to specialise. And so it was kind of appealing, you know, partly obviously from a vocational point of view as well. It seemed to keep things open. So it was appealing. But it turns out looking back that it was actually a really good choice in terms of like being at one of the more interesting schools of business and management in terms of, I guess, what a business school can be from an academic point of view. I think it, I think the kind of, kind of modules that they were describing in the guidebook for that, it was, I guess I was drawn a bit to the sorts of things that they were offering there, which turned out to be, you know, particular areas of that turned out to be of a great interest. So yes, it was, it kind of provided me with a gateway into the sort of ideas that I've been interested in since.

##### Researcher

Okay. Great. Thank you. And so you mentioned that you didn't, like, initially, plan to go into academia or anything. It wasn't an initial kind of aspiration. So what was it that kind of pulled you into that direction?

##### Participant 29

It was mainly a passion for the ideas. I was absolutely buzzed up on [subject] basically. I was reading [author] and all sorts, and, you know, just really blowing my mind. And I was just kind of following it just purely kind of passion driven, really, and not really knowing where things would lead. And so just taking it step by step, really. And I guess the PhD was just a thing for me of saying, okay, well, let's give this a go. You have an opportunity to teach as well. It was like finding a little string and just kind of keep pulling and seeing, you know, following the string kind of thing. So it was just like that really. I haven't got any other academic influences in my family or anything like that. So it was, and it was a bit of a, bit of a shock I think for my dad who saw me going into whatever business or whatever. And I guess in a way it was my kind of like my escape route out of the more conventional career.

##### Researcher

That's interesting to hear, because a lot of people in academia do have that kind of background, like coming from families and parents with PhDs and that kind of thing.

##### Participant 29

I think there are, I think the UK is kind of unusually open in terms of people going into academia. I think from what I've heard in terms of particularly in Southern Europe, if you don't have contacts in academia, it's very, very hard to get in. It's a real kind of nepotistic thing. And I think a lot of people do come, people from other countries do come to do their PhD in the UK, because they know that it's more open. They feel like it'll lead to opportunities that they wouldn't get in their home country, so that's, I think that's definitely something that's characteristic of UK academia. More than the States as well, I think.

##### Researcher

So, obviously, [current institution] in [year], was that onto a postdoc or was it straight onto kind of like a lectureship?

##### Participant 29

Luckily, straight onto a lectureship, yeah, just went straight in, lecturer in [subject]. The position was either [subject] or [another sub-discipline] - advertised with a slash, you know - and so I definitely consider myself more [subject] side, although I have taught in [the other sub-discipline] when it's been needed.

##### Researcher

And in terms of your, I guess, kind of role at the moment, what are your kind of responsibilities? What kind of aspects of the job are you working on in terms of, I guess, research, teaching, admin and any other kind of roles?

##### Participant 29

Yeah. So I mean, I cover all of those things. I think it's probably worth saying at this point, what I mentioned to you in my email, which is that my, my experience going back to about 2014, 2015, has been quite seriously affected by ill health. So in 2014 or 2015 I was diagnosed with [illness]. So I had a really difficult couple of years and it led to exhaustion and it triggered off, basically, I don't know if you've had [infection] in the past, it gives you a kind of vulnerability to that developing into a kind of a full blown condition. And so it's like basically your stamina gets really badly hit. If you don't respect the limits of it, I don't know if you're familiar with the condition, but basically if you don't respect the limits of the stamina your body is allowing you, then you get crashes. Back in 2014, 2015, I was getting crashes that I didn't understand why. So it's quite, it was quite a sort of alarming period. And for about a year I had to build up my ability to read and write and kind of work again, you know. So I had a year which luckily coincided with a sabbatical application. On the one hand, luckily because it gave me a chance to recuperate. But on the other hand, unluckily because I blew my sabbatical. So basically, I guess what I'm just painting a picture of is that my sort of linear trajectory, if you like, as an academic, has been quite badly arrested. I would consider, you know, where I am in terms of my duties and publications and all that kind of thing, I feel like I've got kind of like more or less, I lost five years in that regard, maybe more, you know. But at the same time, I feel I've also been able to kind of like mature as an academic in that time as well. So whereas on paper I probably look like someone who's just come off their PhD, I kind of feel like my kind of general academic kind of, I don't know what you would say, quality of my work or maturity of my work, let's say, I feel like has grown. So in some ways, looking at it philosophically, I'm not, I'm sort of coming to, I'm sort of finding a peace with that and actually just chugging along on my own little pathway. And to give credit where credit is due, I've been very well supported by [current institution]. I've been through the occupational health process and they basically, I never stopped work completely other than the sabbatical. But I was given adjustments. So basically I wouldn't have too much timetabled in one block. So I would only have - and I still have those adjustments - so I have a couple of hours, 2 hours in a row of teaching, and then I must have a break, and no more than 4 hours teaching in a day. And no early starts so I have an opportunity to commute outside of rush hour. And so those are the kind of adjustments which basically means I can carry on with my role.

##### Researcher

Yeah. Well, that's really good. That's really good to hear that they've been so helpful in terms of that.

##### Participant 29

I feel very lucky to be, have been employed in this kind of organisation where there is an occupational health department, you know, and I felt lucky to be on a proper contract and all those kind of things. It is quite humbling when you know how many people probably aren't under those circumstances and get diagnosed with something like that and don't have that support. You know, it's quite terrifying, especially with the kind of government we have at the moment. So yeah, I feel very, very lucky in that regard.

##### Researcher

Definitely. And a lot of kind of academic posts can be quite precarious obviously. So yeah, that's really good to hear.

##### Participant 29

It helps as well that I had heads of department and line managers that were understanding. And I suppose I also already had been in the department for quite a few years, for about five years, so people had got to know me and I suppose I'd established myself a little bit before then. So, you know, people kind of knew my, I guess, work ethic or whatever. You know, they knew me, it was something kind of like, there was some context to put it in, so.

##### Researcher

Yeah. Okay. Yeah, that's really good.

##### Participant 29

So I was saying when you invited me just to kind of flag up that in a way I'm kind of an outlier in terms of my experience. But, you know, maybe that's important for your study too, I don't know.

##### Researcher

Yeah, it is, I like to sort of get a context of the people that I'm talking to because it helps to sort of put what they tell me in perspective. So yeah, that's useful to know, so thank you for sharing that, I do appreciate it.

##### Participant 29

There is lots I could share from my own study, but I'll leave that until after the interview.

##### Researcher

Lovely, thank you. So you mentioned teaching there in terms of responsibilities. So would you say your main responsibilities do revolve in teaching or would you say it's like an equal split with that and other kind of responsibilities?

##### Participant 29

So it's definitely a research department. So of course, we have a teaching load, we have a workload which involves teaching and administration and supervisory duties, but it's the research that I guess is the thing that is the centre piece of what we're doing. Yeah, it's a mix. But I would say that research and also research grants, right, I think even more than when I was doing my own study, doctoral research, I think grants have become more of a thing. I think, you know, we were on the RAE, we're on the REF now, you know, I think you can see those shifts in terms of priorities, slightly away from journal publications as the absolute gold standard towards more of a mix of things, I guess. So I'm sort of aware of that. But yeah, in terms of my role, it's, it's a mix, you know, it's a mix.

##### Researcher

Okay. That's really interesting. And in terms of, I guess, a lot of academics kind of have a workload allocation model where they have, like, kind of a split of time, research, teaching and then admin and that kind of thing. Would you say that kind of your daily or, I guess, kind of like week to week sort of activity kind of reflects that workload allocation quite accurately?

##### Participant 29

In my case, I would say, yes, I think we have a very transparent workload system. It's a thousand hours a year. And I would say, broadly speaking, the allocations, time allocations, are about right for me. Yeah, I would say, yeah, I think it's a good model. And I know there are colleagues who don't feel that way. I think some people, you know, they juggle a lot more, I suppose. The fact that, you know, given my own circumstances, I haven't taken on any big admin roles, managerial roles, you know. And my only role is a [role], which is, you know, very minimal. I mean, I deal with a few emails a week or something, but occasionally more. But it's like, you know, it's a role which I've taken on, which feels proportionate to what's manageable for me at the moment. And then it's just two modules in terms of teaching. So I lead two third year options. So again, they're not huge first year modules. They're module options. Again, I know colleagues who have much more of a challenge with coordinating, particularly at the moment, coordinating big first year modules with multiple TAs and this kind of thing. So in many ways, I kind of feel lucky that going into this kind of, like, particular Covid-19 period, I've actually got a set of duties that's pretty manageable for me, partly as a result of my health.

##### Researcher

Okay. Yeah. That's interesting. And you mentioned that [admin role], that kind of admin role that you do. What kind of led you to take that on? Was that something that you wanted to do? Or was it something you felt you perhaps needed to do? What was that decision process?

##### Participant 29

It's a role I've always had my eye on, because I'm interested, I guess of all the roles I'm kind of interested in the kind of, like, more scholarly side of things. So, you know, [role] seemed like a good one. And I guess my mindset has been, ever since I was first diagnosed with my condition, is to just always be trying to show signs of improvement. So I just try to, you know, each year add something to what I'm doing to demonstrate the progression. And so, you know, there's a kind of, there's a general understanding that everyone should hold some kind of a role if they can, you know? And so I thought, right, I should really, when that role came up, I thought, right, let's get that role. And that's one I can do and it will fit in and it will show that I'm kind of a citizen, if you like, of a department. Which is a term that sometimes gets used. You know, there's clearly some colleagues, often some of the more senior colleagues, the kind of research stars or whatever, there's a kind of a general kind of implication that some people are not good citizens in that way. So they use that phrase, so, you know, attending meetings, covering, helping, when people ask for volunteers to cover things or whatever, you know, that kind of general stuff. Our school is divided into departments now, because it's grown so fast. And so as a department, we have these kind of conversations about things like that. So that was one that came up about citizenship. So I'm always trying to in that sense be seen as a good citizen, you know, alongside the fact that my outputs are rather slow in coming at the moment.

##### Researcher

Thank you. And I guess moving on from that then, obviously, we've spoken a little bit about your kind of responsibilities. I guess I want to know the expectations placed upon you by, I guess, the business school and perhaps the wider university in terms of your kind of research and teaching activities. Obviously it will be, I imagine, dependent on your kind of condition, the kind of expectations placed upon you, but I would still be interested to know, you know, is there an expectation for you to publish a certain amount of journals or in certain journals with certain rankings, and with teaching is there an expectation in terms of the amount of modules or hours you might do? And I guess like student evaluation scores as well, that kind of thing? If you could tell me about those kind of expectations.

##### Participant 29

Yeah. I mean, I'll take the student evaluation one first, just to get that out of the way, which is that there's a kind of a general acknowledgement that the student evaluation... I mean, there is the NSS student evaluation, which, you know, there are certain people in the department who, you know, that's part of their job to make sure that they're going in the right direction. How that tracks down to us is loose, you know, I don't think that has a very direct kind of like line management thing. But then you have the individual module student feedback. And there is a kind of a healthy acknowledgement that these are not good indicators. Well, my experience when we've had heads of department in the past who were kind of a bit more aggressive and managerial in their style, my understanding is, and this is where I think they're quite pernicious, is that they've been used to target individuals that they want to target, rather than being applied universally. So I think there's, we've had one or two heads of department where there's been a lot of problems like that, where there seems to have been people being victimised, you know. And so, yeah, I guess my experience has been that if you're on good terms on other fronts, then it's not going to get used against you sort of thing. But I think even, it's gone beyond that a bit now. I don't know if it's just because we've got quite an enlightened head of department, but there's a very open acknowledgment, particularly now, you know, very low response rates, we know they're kind of epistemologically extremely dubious, you know, like self selecting, all the things that you wouldn't want to see in an empirical research study from a positivistic kind of approach. So yeah, I think anyone would be able to challenge them and they know that. So it's not used, I don't think, managerially. And it's always been explicitly said that these are not being used as a managerial indicator. They're more used as a developmental reference point. But I think if you were getting consistently dreadful scores and there were student complaints and that kind of thing, it might be a problem. But I get the impression that there are colleagues who are professors who get by on their research reputation and they neglect all sorts of things. So I think that's just, I think that's kind of a general thing. So that's the teaching, I don't know if you want to ask any more about that.

##### Researcher

That's all really good, thank you.

##### Participant 29

So yeah, in terms of the teaching, I think it's just a question of like you've got your allocation and as long as the house isn't on fire, so to speak, then you're left your own devices, I get the feeling. There is sort of like periodic tinkering with the syllabus, you know, with the programme structures and so forth. And I guess sometimes people are slightly casualty to that in terms of the modules they would like to be teaching and the ones they have been asked to do. So I think there is individual cases like that. But I think generally speaking, they try not to disrupt too much, but the main, I think the main appraisal kind of thing is to do with research publications. And I've seen that in my time as an academic shift from the getting your "four" kind of thing to, you know, potentially a smaller number of publications, but in what they consider to be very top journals. And in my regard, it's been a bit of a kind of like wildcard for me in that just before I got diagnosed and had my period of illness, I got a publication in what would be an ABS four star journal, and it fell within this REF period. So I've kind of had that in the bag, which I think really helps, because officially my REF kind of quota would be reduced because of the period of ill health, that's kind of recognised. So in a sense, my REF kind of like expectation was reduced to like 0.5 of a publication, and I had one. So I had double the quota basically. So that's helped, that I got a good publication before I got ill. And I kind of have felt, I actually chatted to a union rep at one point about it, but I kind of felt that over time the more I spoke to colleagues I just kind of just got the feeling that would probably do, you know. And so it's more a question now of looking into the next REF period. I mean, we are in the next REF period now, right? So you probably know better than me. Just shows that I'm not like that focused on it because I don't even know when the deadline was. Yeah, I wasn't sure if the delays were deadlines to do with the way that the panels were working or whether it was the deadline, whether it was a deadline to do with the submission date. But anyway, that hasn't been a concern for me personally, but I know that it's important for people to be considered to be REF-able. But my understanding is that there is generally more of an emphasis on quality rather than quantity these days, which seems sensible. There isn't this thing about getting your "four", so to speak. The other thing is about research income and impact as well. So in my time as an academic I've seen the shift to those things. And, you know, lots of departmental seminars led by people who have managed to get funding or have got good impact case studies to share with colleagues to show what they would be aiming for. And so whoever is research director at the time, the sort of like responsibilities are much more, I think, evenly set between publications, research income and impact case studies. And if anything, I would suggest that the emphasis is increasingly on research income. So, expecting people to be putting in bids, research funding applications, not necessarily winning them, but putting them in.

##### Researcher

Okay, that's interesting. You mentioned the kind of changes to research assessment. So obviously you've seen the change from the RAE to the REF, which obviously saw the inclusion of the kind of impact agenda, the impact case study submissions. I guess what I want to ask is, from your kind of perspective, has that changed, has there been any kind of culture change within business schools or I guess the business school that you're in? Has there been kind of a change in terms of how impact is viewed, how impact is kind of prioritised?

##### Participant 29

Well, I don't think there is any such thing as impact before it became a term in the REF process. So, you know, it's not a word you would have heard in 2009, impact, this wouldn't have been, you know, in the discourse. You know, people might have been doing things that you might call impact, but it wasn't called impact, and it wasn't the sort of thing that your research director in the department will have been banging on about, you know. So I think these sort of like discourse shifts or terminological shifts, they kind of move along with the management cultures in the university. And I guess people get into the habit in different ways of thinking about their work in those terms. But I think, I think it's kind of like, at least in my department, I don't think there is any kind of like, there's an understanding that academics may be strong in different areas, right? I think some colleagues will carry on popping out publications, books or whatever, and they'll never do a research grant or they'll never, they'll never do an impact case study, and they'll probably be fine. There will be other colleagues who, you know, maybe it's more of a mix for them, you know, maybe colleagues who have roles outside academia as well that means that they're very much kind of like practitioner focused in different ways. You know, I've got, I've got a colleague who's got a history of working in and with the [industry] globally. And he's had roles on UN panels and this kind of thing. And so he very naturally, you know, is productive of things that can be shown to be impact, so he's an asset to the department in that way. So I guess it's a mixture of different, you know, I guess the idea is that the department has these different individuals with different strengths and kind of a mixed bag of different assets in that regard, I guess.

##### Researcher

That's really interesting. Thank you. And I guess in terms of the expectations of you, I guess in terms of your kind of performance and progression, is there a kind of explicit expectation of you to do impactful research or perhaps even more informal ways of doing impact, you know, perhaps impact through teaching and that kind of thing? Is there an expectation on you would you say?

##### Participant 29

Personally, I've not felt those pressures. Obviously, I'm aware of, you know, I go to departmental meetings, I listen to what's being said by research directors, I follow what the priorities are for the department. In a way, my challenges have been slightly different, I've just been trying to incrementally move back towards, I mean, my focus really is getting back on the publication kind of rhythm, you know? That's my challenge. And my appraisal targets or appraisal objectives have been set in a way that is, you know, they're things that are manageable for me in a way, you know? They haven't included things to do with research funding applications, and they haven't included anything to do with impact. And I think there's an understanding between me and my line manager that my priority is to just start to get some publications under my belt, you know? And so I've got a piece in review at the moment with a good journal, and that's been, you know, chugging along. It's quite an extensive review process, but it's a really good journal, and it's been, it's been quite good news to be on that. So, yeah, for me, I'm just, you know, I haven't, I haven't published since [year], right? I have published, but not like, yeah, not a piece in a journal. So it's just trying to get that wheel turning. And then along with that things like, you know, I went to my first, I gave my first conference presentation two summers ago for the first time in years. So it's just been getting, so each year I've been just incrementally building on what I did the year before, just kind of like getting myself back up to a level of, like, a normal kind of rhythm, and just showing myself to be active in all areas, really. So nobody can turn around to me and say you're not doing X or Y. I'm submitting work, I'm presenting work, I have an admin role, I'm doing my teaching, I'm doing small bits of development or training or whatever. You know, just, just showing I'm an active academic in these different ways.

##### Researcher

Okay. And you mentioned something about, the sort of, the assessment of research has moved from, you said something like getting "four" to kind of to the whole four star thing. So was that a reference to sort of not having to publish X amount of papers, but more kind of in certain journals with certain rankings?

##### Participant 29

Well, my understanding in the shift, I think there's been a change even within the REF structure, which is that there's less of an emphasis on quantity, and there's more of a question, more in the way of selectivity. So there's a kind of like a portfolio, if you like, that the department will put together and that portfolio will be made up of the very best publications in their eyes. And that might mean that some colleagues who consider themselves have very good publications in the end might not be included or might only have one or two pieces included in the department's kind of like portfolio. Which I guess brings pressure of a different kind because I think there's still this kind of, like it was with the RAE, there's still this thing about whether you're seen as being research active or inactive. It's probably not put in those terms anymore, but it's whether you're kind of, whether your work is REF-able or not. And so in terms of that thing about your work being REF-able, I think it's about, you know, this kind of thing about whether you call it world leading or whatever you want to call it, it's about whether you're going to have something that's going to be of that really top tier kind of level that's going to be worthy of being included in that portfolio or not. So you might have produced ten articles in that period, but none of them are going to be included because they're not considered to be like top top pieces. And then you wouldn't be considered to be REF-able. That's a strange situation, right? Not long ago apparently like redundancies of people at [another university] I don't know the full details of it, but I know there's people there with incredible track records of publication, you know, even within the last REF period who are being considered to be not particular research assets, because they're not publishing the kind of things that they would consider to be REF-able. So, you know, a perverse situation. But there it is. That's my understanding. So the piece that I do have I would consider to be REF-able in those terms. And so I guess I'm kind of like quite an extreme example of somebody who has published one thing and it would be REF-able, which would make me REF-able, you know, it's quite an odd situation. Now, I don't think under normal circumstances that would be considered acceptable, that I would have published one piece in five years or six years, you know, I think on a kind of like an annual appraisal cycle there's a general expectation of people to be publishing. I think that's just general. But I think if you are submitting work that counts for something. It might be that you don't publish this year, but next year you do. I don't know. You know, I think, I think being research active is primarily submitting work, but I guess some of it should get published. I'm talking, of course, in very journal oriented terms, because the business school is quite extreme in that way. Of course, people do publish books as well. And I guess that's, particularly with professors, that's more of a kind of a currency, like if you're a prof, you're going to have a book or two. But I still think there's a kind of heavy journal emphasis where people are being expect to publish as kind of like early or mid career researchers.

##### Researcher

Yeah, that's really interesting. And I guess based off of what you just said, I guess kind of a two part question. A, why do you think that is the case? Why do you think journal articles are the currency in business schools? And B, I guess from your experience and your perspective, what is the biggest kind of indicator of the quality of a research output?

##### Participant 29

Oh, well, I suppose there's a question, there's a response those questions which is sort of like, in the terms of a more kind of objective like nature, so, okay, why did journals become the gold standard? I think it's very much to do with the kind of, like a joined up relationship between a certain kind of, metricised managerialism, if you like, totally linked up with the role of the journal ranking lists. I mean, again, I think there's been some changes since I was introduced to this in [year], but there was definitely a kind of high watermark where management was just being done by proxy. You know, it was like, nobody was interested in what you're working on, they just want to know what's your ABS score, you know, how many points have you got on your "four", you know? Like that's it. Like it was extremely reductive. And, you know, that invested a lot of power in the people formulating the journal ranking list, the ABS, in particular. And it also, of course, invested a lot of power with journal editors as well. And I understand there was some degree of corruption in that as well, right, that goes on in the background. But, so, yeah, I think, I think that business schools, ironically, have been extremely poor examples, particularly through that extreme period, in terms of what management is, what it should be. I think you can set that in the context of the university as a whole, in terms of this kind of like certain kind of, let's call it managerialism or what have you, there's actually, in my eyes, and I think in a lot of people's eyes, a very crude version of management, you know? Not the kind that we would necessarily be teaching to our students in terms of best practise, right? Very reductive, you know, very top down, very systems oriented and completely inappropriate for the kinds of work that we're doing. I guess I'm moving now into a values kind of like end of the spectrum. I think if you're working, let's say, in a creative department where you're trying to produce world leading creative work commercially, you wouldn't be doing things in that way, you know, managing people by numbers. You wouldn't be reducing people's work down to metrics. It just doesn't make sense. It's qualitative. These are qualitative questions, which are questions of judgement. So there's this massive tension and this comes, you know, I guess it goes to the financialization of the university as well. You know, the university being run by numbers and budgets and so forth, by cash flows, you know, cash flows, basically there's a kind of like a phrase I like to use which is in terms of the way that teaching gets shaped, which is that I'm constantly seeing the people in management roles looking for pedagogic solutions to managerial problems, rather than managerial solutions to pedagogic problems. The university now - I don't want to ramble on too much about this - but the university, people might call it in the neoliberal university, call it what you like, the university is now an institution which is dominated by cash flows. Increasing student numbers is a great example. There's a dominance in all areas of academic life now by those priorities. So, and there's a sort of like, I guess I see it in colleagues, a kind of like a strange sort of realism about these things, you know? People in managerial roles or roles of responsibility have, there's a lot of that kind of like, "oh, well, you know, these are the expectations being set, these are the pressures", and very little in the way of "that doesn't make sense". Or it might be "that doesn't make sense but this is what we have to do", rather than a sense of "we are the academic body". You know, I guess the traditional way of looking at the university is that, you know, they weren't managers, they were administrators, right? And so you have the professoriate, you have the faculty, and then you have administrators who support what the faculty does and the governance structure of the university is all about, is driven by academic concerns, questions of academic judgement. I guess that was an era which was partly protected by unit funding from government. So, if you had X number of students, you would get X amount of money, and the financial stability of the institution wasn't really a question. It was more a question of academic concerns, right? That's not the case anymore. So everything that has happened in the university since the 80s I think you can map fairly well on to the reduction of government financing of universities and the dependence of universities on private sources of financing. I think if you start there, a lot of other things make sense. I've gone really wide angle, but I find it difficult to answer those questions, let's call it on a micro level, if you like. I find it difficult to answer those questions without setting it in a context.

##### Researcher

That's really interesting. Thank you. So you mentioned the importance of those kind of private streams of income...

##### Participant 29

Student income is what I mean by private sources of income, right? Overseas students. Sorry to interrupt.

##### Researcher

Yeah, no, of course, that makes sense.

##### Participant 29

If I may say, a shifting of the kind of like, it's shifting of the balance between research income and teaching. The teaching income has become arguably more important than research income. That's a big shift. I don't think the university has even yet quite caught up with that. I was in a meeting this week where we were discussing master's dissertations, you know, just seeing if there were things that we could do to improve the way that they are run and everything else. Master's dissertations have been kind of like, we used to supervise master's students on a one to one basis. We now supervise them in groups, right? We don't read drafts, so they get group supervision. If they get one to one support that's up to the supervisor, but it's not timetabled. So we were having this discussion about how that could be improved and people are generally saying, well, stopping group supervision would be a good start. There's also the separation there between the marking of dissertations and the supervising. So previously the supervisor supervises the dissertation, they mark the dissertation, and they know the student, blah blah blah. Now that's all separated so it's almost like it's been taylorised, if you like. And you know, one of my colleagues make the point, well, I have to be blunt about this, but we have students, master's students coming in, who are clearly not capable of doing a dissertation in English. They just cannot do it. You could give them one to one supervision, you could read their drafts, you could do everything else - they're not up to it. And of course, there are colleagues who say well, I'm not involved in admissions, not my department kind of thing. But it's like, so then the conversation moves to do we even need a dissertation? Maybe we could have some kind of like, maybe they could do some kind of corporate report and then it's like, okay, no, because we've got students doing CIPD and they request the students do one... so maybe we have a CIPD route and a non-CIPD route. So you can see there, pedagogic solutions to managerial problems, because there's a realism there with regard to the fact that the admissions pressures are to bring in as many master's students as you can possibly sign up. And give them master's degrees, because then there's a pressure to actually pass them as well, right? Because again, there's statistics, so those students look at the statistics to see where they're going to get their master's from, and, you know, they look at fail rates and all the rest of it. Everyone is under pressure to keep fail rates down. So degrees are being given to students, you know, standards are falling. And this is happening on an undergraduate basis too. I'm just using that as an example in terms of the way in which the priority is the cash flow and then everything else works around that, and seeing that manifested in a departmental meeting, which are ostensibly academic concerns, right? How do we make our master's programme run better? But there's a sort of a deference to the business logic of the university coming from on high, which seems increasingly... well, maybe it's a business school thing, but it doesn't seem questioned by many of my colleagues. Many of my colleagues don't seem to really question it in the sense that, you know, even if the university should be something else, it's not our business to ask that, you know? It's above my pay grade sort of a thing rather than we are the faculty. You know, this is not a university, blah blah blah. Similar thing - and I won't go on at such length - similar thing with giving first class degrees or giving people 2:1s or firsts. There's been a very strong steer, we have been shown league tables in our departmental meetings, of where our department falls in the league table of where good degrees are being awarded by our competitors. And you know, we've never been told explicitly you have to give more 2:1s or firsts, but there was a period where it was like, these are the sort of like the benchmarks which you should be aiming for. They have this thing called 60, 60, 60, which is like, the majority of students should be getting a 60 or above... I can't remember what the other 60's were, but you get the idea. So grade inflation basically. Massive grade inflation. Firsts are being given away like candy, you know. I've only been an academic, a salaried academic since [year] - I've seen a massive change. Which then drives the master's game as well, because if you can't, if everyone's getting a first, then you have differentiate yourself with a master's, so it's basically, yeah, the ability of the university to sustain themselves is getting more and more precarious and they're crawling over each other to recruit students to get the income in. And it's like, those cash priorities are just smothering everything else. And you can see, you can see, this is me going broad picture again, but you can see it in all layers of public life. You can see it in hospitals, you can see it in schools. Public institutions are being - oh, municipal government as well, starve the money to the point where they have to, you know, what does a local government do when the central budget gets cut in half? They start having to sell off property, they start having to do commercial activities, they're getting in bed with property developers. You know, I'm just using these examples of showing how I think the cash logic, the business logic of the university, now, everything just follows in its trail. That's how I see it. It doesn't mean there isn't pockets of difference, it doesn't mean there isn't persistence of that professional, professorial language. But that's the tide, if you like, for me.

##### Researcher

And I guess that resonates with the whole students increasingly being seen as customers, aren't they? And not as students.

##### Participant 29

And they're encouraged to see themselves as customers. I get students who, I mark a whole load of coursework and I send the marks out, and of course, you brace yourself for the five students who got failed to write to you angrily and everything else. And it's their right and, you know, you understand, it's upsetting. And so a student writes to you and goes, "I don't understand my mark, this has never happened to me before, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah", you know, "I think there's a mistake, you have to look at it again". So I go into the online marking system to look up the student. They've got a 63! You got a 63, or whatever. It's like... and the work wasn't good. You know, I was probably being generous. There's an expectation that, you know, they paid that money and blah, blah, blah. And you'll understand this, the pressures they're under and debt and everything else. But it's like, one of my colleagues laughs at me, he talks about me marking like it's 2010. I sort of have this idea in my head that that's a first, that's a 2:1, that's a 2:2. And those are the kind of like, those are sort of like absolute qualitative things, you know, that you really, you know a first when you see it. I have a lot of colleagues who don't think of it that way at all. We're encouraged to use the full range of marks and people are giving 80s and 90s and whatever, just like it was a maths test in a primary school, you know. And those master's students, you feel for them because clearly they've been like, they're under pressure to go off and do a master's in English and everything else. And it's unreasonable. They haven't got the level of English to do it and all the rest of it. So you feel for them. I've had master's students where they've failed their master's dissertation, and I've given them all the help I can, and they fail it again. You know, it's sad. I've even given a lower mark the second time once. It's like, you can only imagine what their home life must be like, the pressure on them. Or not, you know, I don't know, maybe I'm just projecting. But you feel like they're being set unreasonable tasks for their level of language ability and, you know, maybe even their interests. I don't know.

##### Researcher

Yeah, it's very interesting. I wanted to ask as well, you know, you talked about those income streams from master's students and international students and that kind of thing. And some have argued that the pandemic has kind of threatened those income streams...

##### Participant 29

I'm cautious about that narrative. I mean, I guess I'm quite strongly aligned with my union branch and what goes on from the union perspective and my reading of things is that there's been a lot of opportunism with the pandemic to use it as an excuse to do managerial things that they wanted to do anyway. I think there was a huge overreaction to the pandemic - "oh, we have to cut costs, student numbers are going to be obliterated!" Now, this might be just a business school perspective, because numbers have held up pretty well in our department in terms of student registrations and everything, but even at the time when this was all kicking off back in last year, last April or whatever, all the very sober colleagues and people with expertise in terms of admissions and all that, I think were saying, you know, "we don't know", and numbers have held up. But yet, teaching staff on precarious contracts have been thrown to the wolves and, you know, redundancy waves - not in our university, but lots of other universities - waves of redundancies and all the rest of it, you know. I don't find it convincing, this narrative. I think that in many ways there has been a successful shift to online learning and students are trying to get on with their lives and people need degrees and they're getting on with things. So I'm quite sceptical of that narrative. That's my feeling, and that's a very strong vibe I get from the union and their advice and the big picture that they get of the sector. I'm sure there's variation, you know, and I'm in a business school which is in a research university. So, you know, we maybe have come out of it well. But even in that setting, you know, as an example, I see that as having been exploited, or overreacted to, and I think that serves certain agendas.

##### Researcher

Would you say there was that kind of anticipation from your institution that there would be issues with that?

##### Participant 29

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. I mean, I'm [role] for example, you know, like massive caution on any kind of spending in personal research budgets - stopped. No money for anything. It was like war mentality. You can understand some of that. But in terms of the management staff, I think there's been some other agendas.

##### Researcher

And has that, do you see any kind of influence that anticipation has had on your kind of day to day working activities, you know, how you're kind of expected to prioritise things and perhaps your colleagues as well, if you've been aware of any of their kind of experiences?

##### Participant 29

The main thing that comes to mind is about conferences, like money available to go and do, you know, to pay the registration fees. But obviously everything's online at the moment. But even for online conferences, it was like our budgets were just stopped. And it's like, okay, so my appraisal target is to go to a conference this year, blah, blah blah. And I have work which I need to present. How does that work? And there wasn't really an answer to that. It's just like, we can't take any risks at the moment, blah blah blah. So that was quite odd. It was like a real interruption of the normal rhythms of things. And I guess people paid out of their own pockets - I did for one conference. In terms of my own activities, I can't think of there being much disruption personally. I mean, for me, personally, the commute and the going to campus in terms of my energy levels, my health and everything, that's the most tiring part of my week. So actually teaching from home and doing everything from home, you know, I happen to have a good study space at home and everything. It's actually good for me. And I'm sure that's the same for some people have long commutes, you know, they don't live in the place where they work and all that kind of thing. And maybe people with kids. And I think people have got lots of different circumstances where it may have helped them in some ways, you know, it's a bit of a lottery, right? Like some people have got a good spacious home, some people don't. Some people have got kids, some don't. All that kind of stuff. I'm sure you're hearing the whole, the whole mix. But, you know, for me, it's actually been helpful.

##### Researcher

That's good. There's kind of, I guess, one more question that I want to ask just to kind of finish things up, which is about, I guess, your kind of future plans and also to an extent how you've got to where you are now. I would be interested to know if you feel like you've had any kind of strategy for getting to where you are in terms of your kind of current position? And maybe not so much a strategy, maybe you kind of take each day as it comes or, you know, that kind of thing. And then also on the flip side, you know, where you perhaps want to be in 5, 10 years time? And what do you feel like you need to do to get to that kind of position? You know, what do you feel like is important for you to kind of progress in your career, given everything we've spoken about in terms of, you know, teaching research, priorities of the business school, the kind of environment of the business school, the expectation based upon you, what do you feel like your strategy needs to be to kind of progress in that environment?

##### Participant 29

I think that's a great question. It's a really good question. I like the way that you refer it back and forwards in that way. So in terms of my kind of like career up to this point, I would say that it had generally been more reactive, I guess? You know, bumbling through sort of thing. You know, what's the immediate pressure? Whether that's been finishing my PhD, whether that's been getting this publication or doing this. And I would say that bumbling, I would say that earlier on, particularly through the PhD years and everything, I had a very kind of like natural sort of like academic sociability, I guess? Which served me quite well to meet people, just presenting and going to conferences was a very natural thing. You know, I think that the challenge for me now very, very clearly is publications. It's like, you know, I have very few top level publications for my age, for the length of my career and everything. I've clearly, you know, that's clearly taken a hit because of my health over the last sort of like five, six, seven years. And you know I have this conversation with my appraisers each year, and I've had very nice appraisers who have understood all this and everything. And, you know, it's a very open conversation that, you know, they're not putting pressure on me in any other areas because that's all I need to do. And it's not like a threatening thing necessarily. But it's just like, you know. And, of course, when you have an appraisal meeting, they also talk about promotion because that's part of what they, they want everyone to be on a kind of an ongoing developmental thing. And it's like, you know, it's a pretty open conversation that, for me to be in the frame to be even, like, thinking about a promotion... and, you know, they're not discouraging, but it's like, you know, definitely like, two, three more publications under the belt, you know? And so that's very, very clear to me. And so, you know, that's, I don't really have any other focus than that. Keep up, keep everything else ticking along. I would just say that within that, though, there's always this thing about what's the immediate kind of like, objective. And then what is the bigger picture in terms of actually having a project like in terms of what's it for sort of a thing, you know? So I think for me as well it's partly also a bit of a sense of kind of like academic identity as well and having something that's really driving me. And I guess at different stages in one's academic life, you know, one has periods where you know what you're interested in and you know what you're doing. And then other times you're sort of like, I guess, I guess academia kind of has a tendency of channelling you into particular specialisms and things. And I guess if you're somebody that has different interests then sometimes you wrestle with that a bit because you end up, it's almost like people expect you to be a specialist. So I would just say that behind that sort of thing about the immediate thing of "I need publications" in that very kind of like, you know, ticking the box sort of a thing, it's actually like, well, which publications? And what am I saying? What about, what's of concern to me? And which conversations do I want to be involved in? What's really important for me in terms of what the stakes are of all this stuff? I guess there's a sort of a more background sort of thing about not just the publications in terms of, like, lines on a CV, but also, you know, in some ways, the fact that I haven't published very much, in some ways I'm quite glad, because it's allowed my thinking to mature a bit, you know? And I haven't had that pressure of like banging out, banging out, banging out. And, you know, maybe it's a bit of a luxury in a way, and maybe it's a luxury I'm going to have to get out of. But it's like that thing about being a bit more selective about what you're saying and actually having pieces of work that you're really proud of and that really set a certain standard. And are seen academically rather than managerially as valuable. So I guess there's a part of me which is like, I suppose the job is a great role. And I probably said some negative things about what the university is. But it's also a fantastic role. It's a wonderful life and I can speak positively all day long about that. But it's also, I guess that thing, what's it for? It's like, it's almost like, the sort of fear factor about oh, have I hit my targets? Did I do this? It's like, why am I defensive of that position? What do I want to do with it? It's like, why defend, why have a job in a university? Is it just to keep the pay check and, you know, of course, having a pay check, especially in these times, is it in itself, you know, not to be sniffed at, right? But pay check here, pay check there, whatever. I think there has to be some meaning behind what you're doing. That's always part, in the frame, not just trying to jump through the hoops that I'm given, you know, and I was talking to a colleague about this the other day, it's like, "oh, my line manager says I should be doing this, and my inclination is to do more of this", and I'm like, well, you know what? There are moments when you might want to just take on board what your line manager says, and then do what is right for your academic progression. Because maybe in ten years time, that instinct for what's really important for you is going to serve you better than whatever your line manager wants you to do this year. That might sound a bit complacent, I don't know. But I think it's important to have an element of that slightly kind of like, that's what you want, you advise me on what my interests are from your perspective are, I make an evaluation of what my priorities are from my own perspective in terms of my academic projects, defending the academic projects that you have. It's important to have that dual consciousness in a way. Not to be complacent about the immediate pressures that people are under as well, you know.

##### Researcher

That's really interesting. I have a kind of a small follow up question in my mind, if you don't mind me asking you just one more question?

##### Participant 29

Please, please, yeah yeah. Apologies if I've rambled on, really long answers to questions.

##### Researcher

No, no, it's fine. I think the longer the better, really, honestly. And I don't have any immediate things to be doing so. You mentioned something quite interesting about kind of taking, I guess, what your line manager says with a pinch of salt and thinking, actually, what is best for me in this situation? I guess, I can only ask you about this personally from your kind of perspective, but is what you kind of perceive as being what you would like to be doing to kind of progress, how much of that is based on your own kind of goals, ambitions and aspirations and your natural kind of interest in academia and your job and your kind of satisfaction from what you do, and how much of that do you think comes from the kind of norm for an academic to kind of get to, like, professor level? Because obviously, you know, there will be aspects of what your line manager wants you to do to be linked with your kind of progression to a professor or whatever.

##### Participant 29

When you were talking about my own goals and you use the word progression and you talked about things like becoming a prof, this kind of thing, I wasn't thinking in those terms, I was thinking more about what you might call the sort of more intrinsic motivations of being a scholar or an academic in the sense of the community of other the scholars. I wasn't thinking more in terms of identity, more in terms of a community perhaps, a scholarly community. I guess it goes back to what I was talking about earlier... perhaps partly a mythical idea, but the idea that the university was once of a faculty which had administrators that supported it rather than individual academics who are managed by a quasi corporate structure, you're employees, you're skilled service providers. I guess I'm talking about the part of the role which is not about any of that. It's about the sharing of ideas and the opening up of minds and the stakes of the things that you're talking and writing about that, you know, those are the concerns that drive what you do when you're writing about equality and diversity, or, you know, capitalism as an exploitative system or standards in accounting or whatever it is - the concerns that drive you, why does it matter, what's important about it? And the aspect of teaching, that the idea that people might walk away from your module and see the world differently from the way they did before. You know, those things. And for me, if becoming a prof has got anything to do with any of those things, it would only be as a, as a means towards those ends. As a prof you may be able to launch things or make things happen in a way that you couldn't if you weren't. But certainly not like, if I'm not a prof by the time I'm 50 I'll feel like I've failed kind of thing. Absolutely not. I respect that some people may have family, you know, considerations where it's important for them to increase their income, or they have partners that they support or caring or other things. You know, I don't have those immediate pressures for me. I don't have financial reasons why I have to seek promotion rapidly. So it's not a major consideration. And in terms of how I feel, I'm seen by my academic colleagues, or at least the ones who I care about their perspectives, I don't think they look at me any differently whether I'm a lecturer, senior lecturer, or professor.

##### Researcher

Okay. Yeah. That makes sense. Thank you. That's really interesting. I think in terms of questioning I'm probably done there then.

##### Participant 29

I guess you could call it the organic role, or something like that, you know?

##### Researcher

Yeah, yeah. I guess more like what the work you're doing actually stands for and what it means in a more kind of holistic way than just the arbitrary linear progression to professor?

##### Participant 29

Something more than just keeping your head above water and making sure the pay check comes in. Like, I guess, defending something of a vision of the role and what it's for and of the university, which is, you know, seriously under attack. I mean, attack sounds a bit dramatic, but, you know, the university is being, I think, run by people who don't quite see the university in that way. They think they do. But it's a very different vision in fact of what the university is and what it's for. And what the academic role is. So I guess part of my inhabiting that role is also slightly in defence of a particular vision of what that role is and seeking out like minded colleagues in that way. And maintaining, it's almost like a subculture. Nurturing that subculture, you know, you could put it in more dramatic terms as the resistance or whatever, haha. It's sort of like the underground resistance of the soul of the university. You get what I mean.

##### Researcher

Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. It's definitely, it's a lot of food for thought, yeah. No, it's interesting. So, thank you for your honesty. I really appreciate it.

##### Participant 29

You're welcome and it's been really nice talking. And if you want to come back to me, you're very welcome, just to leave the door open in that regard.

##### Researcher

Thank you.