0:0:0.0 --> 0:0:19.930
Shahenda Shehata
Yes. So I think the recording started now. all personal information, university, position, name, role, this data would not be collected, would not be part of the paper, of the thesis or any publication would not be shared with any other party, to keep anonymity and confidentiality of my participants.

0:0:18.960 --> 0:0:20.230
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OK. Thank you.

0:0:21.20 --> 0:0:30.320
Shahenda Shehata
Thank you. So may I know how the performance measurement or the evaluation of the academics occurred in the university?

0:0:31.930 --> 0:0:40.320
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Well, do you? So maybe I need to talk about my different experiences in different universities.

Because just by way of background. So currently I'm in a professorial level in my current university, but in my previous university I was a Dean of a faculty, so I guess I was more in charge of managing those kinds of performance measures of the staff who were employed in my faculty. So do you want me to talk about both experiences, maybe or.

0:1:15.780 --> 0:1:16.500
Shahenda Shehata
Yes, please.

0:1:17.830 --> 0:1:22.420
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So just repeat your opening question.

0:1:24.100 --> 0:1:40.260
Shahenda Shehata
So my question is how the evaluation of the academics occurred, like from your previous experience as a position as a Dean. So I think you had the experience of managing these performance measurement.

0:1:41.90 --> 0:1:42.30
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Yes, so.

Well, in both my previous institution and this one were we managed these, we managed individual performance through appraisals and gosh, what do we call them? PDA's.

Uh professional. Well, appraisal systems, really through a line management structure.

So every academic would have an annual personal appraisal of their academic performance, I guess, is that the kind of thing you were thinking of? You know, how do we have a formal process for managing performance? Is that what you're referring to?

0:2:37.610 --> 0:2:41.710
Shahenda Shehata
Yes. Do you apply the REF. The TEF, the KEF, these measures?

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***Oh, uh, yes, absolutely. But not entirely. So explicitly at a personal level, certainly less so. TEF and KEF, we would consider the REF at an individual level, but I think for more for TEF and KEF, if we would look at those more as a collective sort of institutional level.***

Whereas I think the REF is very much in the mindset of the way that we appraise and manage individual performance of academics on the research side.

And I think TEF was less individualized in most of the institutions I've worked in, partly because the measures tend to be around.

The things that individual academics cannot necessarily influence so directly, for example things like student retention on a program or employability measures or measures of that nature.
And not necessarily the kind of thing that an individual academic teaching a module can necessarily influence all by themselves. So we didn't tend to refer to those kind of measures so directly in individual academic performance.

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We might refer to them more for, let's say particular program, a program leader or a program director who could potentially have, I don't know, let's say lots of failure rates on that program or high levels of underachievement on a program where we might be investigating and evaluating those things, but I don't think we would hold the individual academic so responsible for those particular measures. If that makes sense.

0:5:8.920 --> 0:5:17.890
Shahenda Shehata
Yeah, sure it is. The student retention and employability measures; how the institution manage these measures?

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So they would be sort of collated at a departmental faculty level in in the institution so often they would be provided by and gathered by our central services and then, for example, in my last role as Dean, they would be fed back to the to the schools within the faculty that I was managing for us to evaluate. I had two colleagues who were the assistant Dean for education, who would be managing mostly the test measures and we would be monitoring those to see how we fared against the particular test measures. All of the NSS measures, for example, or the value added scores we would we had. Wash it so long. It's 2 1/2 years since I left that job, so I'm trying to remember what we did.

We had a kind of what do you call it?

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It is a kind of like a traffic light system where we would be flagging up that would be monitoring the measures and we'll be flagging up when any measures were problematic or likely to be a risk to the quality of our TEF, for example.

Does that make sense?

0:7:15.610 --> 0:7:16.690
Shahenda Shehata
Yes, sure.

0:7:17.420 --> 0:7:20.930
Shahenda Shehata
So, how do you think these measures impacting you as an academic?

0:7:23.690 --> 0:7:27.840
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Well, I think it depends on what your role is as an academic.

So I think let's talk about the REF. I think for individual academics the REF. It has become a mantra which is absolutely central to the their thinking. About research and for example.
Umm, I think many academics are quite obsessed with a journal rankings in order to validate their work for REF purposes. Because many universities now are saying that a work which is deemed to be less than three or four-star “REF criteria” is not going to be submitted to the REF. So colleagues who are publishing work in lower ranking journals which might be more practitioner oriented or might be let you know. Maybe it's methodological or maybe it's not so theorized, but it's still a valid piece of work. I think subject to increasing pressure to produce work in these higher rank journals. And that I think that affects the way that people behave, you know that. Increasingly. More applied research, which is difficult to publish in the higher ranked business and management journals. I wouldn't say it's frowned upon, but it's harder to produce, it's harder to do good quality applied research, which at the same time can be published in a high-ranking journal. And I think that affects people's choices about the type of research that they do.

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Umm, I think there's also the issue of the behaviours of academics in terms they know that their career trajectory is heavily influenced by the kind of outputs. Research outputs that they can produce and so they often prioritize that side of the work against other types of work, so for example I think that individual academics are very much more influenced by the REF than they are by the TEF and the KEF because, as I said, the REF is more personalized towards you, your outputs, your impact, whether you contribute to an impact case, et cetera, that directly affects your promotion opportunities whereas. That at the moment, I think certainly in the universities I've worked in the TEF and the KEF seem a bit more abstracted from an individual. They feel a bit more collective. And KEF, I think a lot of people don't even really engage with that much yet either, whereas a REF is very much more associated with individual performance, **so the result of that is that people prioritize their research outputs at the expense of other parts of the work, like for example a good quality teaching or curriculum development or initiatives that support students.**

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I don't say everybody does that and that and certainly my current institution, and previous ones, there's some very dedicated educators who really enjoy and engagement with students, support students really well and, you know, actually produce, have good metrics associated with that. Like NSS for example. **But, there is a tendency, I think, in British academia to focus more strongly on research as a means of career progression, and then therefore, people prioritize trying to get those outputs.** I think it depends on the type of academic you are. You know, if you're an early career researcher, it's all about getting those outputs. It's all about publications. Absolutely right.

And I think. Sometimes we tolerate. You know, in experience, within teaching or lack of. I wouldn't, I hesitate to say poor teaching because I think people can learn to teach better, but sometimes we tolerate teaching, which is not up to the standard that we hope to achieve.

If people are producing high quality publications, you know and actually be better to have academics which are. Who are rounded whole academics who produce interesting and impactful research but also are good, high quality educators. So I can I think. For early career academics. The REF metrics are something which become a stick you know to beat people with, frankly.

0:14:20.100 --> 0:14:28.760
Shahenda Shehata
How do you see other colleagues do to meet the requirements of their the REF? For instance, do they have any means for managing the system?

I'm not going to say “gaming”, this is the what I'm going to say. Managing the system like any previous experience of.

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In the last REF, people were allowed to collaborate on a papers from the same institution.

In in the REF. 21 in the previous REF 2014 you weren't able to do that, you couldn't submit a paper which had you know you couldn't get like 2 people submitting the same paper where there were co-authors from the same institution, I think yeah. I think people do game the system. I think people often will collaborate on papers where they almost take it in turns to be the leader, author, or the major contributor to a paper and the other person perhaps just plays a very, very minor part in that paper, but there's still a named author on the paper, and then they swap around for a subsequent piece of work so that you get kind of teams of people who work together and they're they appeared to be producing a lot of, you know, volume about outputs of publications, but actually their contribution can be minor to these publications.

So I've seen that happen on numerous occasions where people play that kind of a game and they do it because they want the output.

0:16:45.340 --> 0:16:54.470
Shahenda Shehata
But it seems that the REF criteria is changing from a period to another. Why they keep changing?; especially for the early career they got confused.

Because they don't know what to do if they change every cycle, they change the criteria so the people feel like what should I do?

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Well, I think it's deliberately changed to stop universities from gaming the system. That's why the REF criteria changes because in the previous REF.

**Let's say REF 2014 you know well in previous REFs, before that, universities were only submitting their academics who had a sufficiently good performance to enable them to get good scores on their outputs, for example.**

In the last draft that was changed so that every academic who had what they called ***a significant responsibility for research*** had to be submitted. And the idea and the reason I think the REF organizers did that was to prevent universities just submitting, you know, a handful of people from each department instead of a representative good number of people within their institution.

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And there were cases where you know that in the distant past where universities would submit, say, a couple of high publishing professors who got lots of four-star papers, supposedly, and nobody else. And yet the department might be full of people who not really published anything and so that completely gamed the system, whereas in the last REF in the 21 REF the rules were redefine to try and prevent that kind of behaviour. But still, universities gamed the system because they played around with the idea of this idea of ***a significant responsibility for research*** and the way they did that. I know this because my previous university did it and my current university did it the way they do it is by looking at the allocation of a people's workload, that is devoted to the research or, you know the time that they have for research and. So for example in my last university, where I was Dean, we actually we I personally led a whole university project, which was to redefine the academic career structure for the university where we tried to get more parity between education and research so that people could get promoted by being excellent education as well as being excellent at research, and we redefined all the criteria. And we tried to bring in things like collegiality and leadership and contribution, service and so on.

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Which, in some ways have very laudable aims. But yeah, and it was implemented, but the university could then sort of use those different career pathways to make some people not eligible for REF purposes in which is essentially meant the pool of people being submitted to REF. Were those who had the research outputs and then. That's a way of sort of gaming the system so that people who are more practitioner focused or more education focused and perhaps don't have the research outputs are not included in the REF metrics.

And that happens. That happens everywhere I think. So I think I think this gaming goes on at 2 levels it go, it can go on at an individual level where people behave in certain ways to try to get secure. Some three and four start outputs for themselves.

**It also goes on at institutional level, where universities try and manipulate their contracts and their structures in order to ensure they have the best number of academics going into the REF.**

0:22:16.670 --> 0:22:30.590
Shahenda Shehata
And for the teaching, do you think the institutions itself could have, like a certain means to manage the TEF? And would this impact the teaching quality of the academics, how they teach, how they treat the students?

Does it make any difference in the teaching process?

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I think it does make it a difference. I do think it makes a difference because where you have for example, while I'm trying to remember all the TEF metrics but and you know one I think is about added value and that's about where you have students coming in with certain characteristics or attainment levels from their A levels or from their school. And then there's a measure of value added so you know what degree classification do they come out with at the end of their degree program and that's the kind of measure of to what element? To what degree have you supported through the education process, their attainment and their development that they've had through education ***and that's partly based on the numbers of classifications that they have in the degrees. So you know, are we awarding a lot of first class degrees,2:1 degrees et cetera and*** I think that kind of measure can i***nfluence behaviours in the organization of program leaders or of individual academics because we've seen, you know, what we keep hearing about grade inflation, universities awarding pick 50% of their*** ***students 2:1 or first class degrees.***

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And I mean, the students may deserve those degrees, but it's a question of how the criteria are set and how the calculations of the classifications are done. And I think that kind of thing influences individual academic behaviour. When you get down to discussions of, you know, if we're awarding too many top class degrees. Are we marking too generously? Should we be tougher with the way that we do our assessments? Should we be having different types of assessments? Should we do more exams? You know, these are the kind of conversations that come through because of this kind of metric being considered. It and that impact the way academics behave and the way students experience their degrees.

0:25:25.410 --> 0:25:31.790
Shahenda Shehata
And What is the significant responsibility of research? I didn't get it.

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do you know about that?

0:25:35.910 --> 0:25:36.580
Shahenda Shehata
no.

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I think all universities. Yeah, I think all universities did it. So the REF rules in the last REF were that universities had to submit they had to tell the REF panel. How many full time equivalent academics there were in their in each unit of assessment? And their organization so. Let's say, what is it? Unit 17. Is it business management? Let's say you've got 150 people working in a Business School. And that is Unit 17 business and management in the REF, but let's say only 100 of those are given a 40% of their time in a workload to spend on research, and the remaining 50 are only given 20% of their time to spend on research. So some people get two days a week. Some people get one day a week, and it's only those who have more than 30% of their time spent on research.

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Who would be deemed to have what the REF calls a significant responsibility for research? And then that is the criteria through which they would be submitted to REF, so when the REFs census occurs, that Business School could say we've got 150 people, but only 100 of them have got a significant responsibility for research. So only the number that goes in is only 100, not 150, and therefore the output or the publications that go in are only from those hundred people, but they are going to be your 100 best people. They are going to be the people who are producing research and the other 50 might be people who you know they haven't really gotten any publications because they don't have much time. They're mostly focusing on teaching and other things or they, you know, they do more applied research, practitioner research or stuff like more textbooks or something like that, which doesn't count for REF purposes.

0:28:36.700 --> 0:28:50.140
Shahenda Shehata
Yeah, but how the university allocate the time for each academic? Like, how do they say this person gonna take 20% of their time for research or this person gonna take 60% for their time? How they do that?

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They do that through performance management, so they would do that through the kind of appraisal system and look at the outputs that people are producing. And if people are meeting nor objectives to produce three and four-star outputs, they would probably give them more, more time, give them the 40% of time if they're not producing those outputs, then in many in the universities I've worked in, there would potentially have their research time reduced. So there's kind of a reward for success if you like, but actually it makes it harder for those people who haven't succeeded to succeed because they get less time. So certainly in my current job and in my previous job, we would do an annual evaluation of everybody each year to decide how much research time to give them and that would be based on whether we evaluated that they were performing against the mostly the metrics outputs in particular.

0:30:20.300 --> 0:30:27.370
Shahenda Shehata
But do you think if there is no measures at all in academia, would you work differently with other colleagues? Work differently?

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Yes, I think we would work differently. We would because. I think some colleagues would actually value the opportunity to really focus on students and education because they see themselves as educators first and foremost. And even if there were no REF, I think people would focus on some people would want to focus on education much more than they do. I think if there were no TEF, people were just feel they would still do things for the benefit of students. I'm sure they would because most people care about students and their experience. But maybe they would be less constrained in what they did. I think that academics are under enormous pressure. And without these metrics that pressure might be lifted. People's well-being would be better. I think that people's mental health would be better, and actually I think it'd be a much pleasanter.

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***Career structure*** for people to be quite honest, you know, I've been an academic for more than 22 years. When I joined. The REF; I don't think it even started. And now? ***I wouldn't get a job.*** On the basis that I did when I first joined, you know, I hadn't finished my PhD, I didn't have any publications, but I got a job in a good university and just progressed through. Now academics, you know, they have to have a PhD There's something, maybe some post-doctoral experience. There have to have four or five publications, even funding before they can get their first proper job. And when they get a job, they're under a lot of performance management pressure.

0:33:15.980 --> 0:33:25.180
Shahenda Shehata
Even the Universities, which signed the Dora do you think it's effective? Does it make, like more relaxed atmosphere for the academic or no effect?

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I think it's a bit of a gloss. I don't know if it's a real change. It's not a real cultural change because people still refer to journal ranking lists. And even when we read and do peer review of people’s academic work and publications. Subconsciously, people are still thinking that's a poor star journal. You know they don't. They're not thinking is this piece of work a four-star piece of work they're thinking. Well, it's published in a three or four-star journals, so it must be it must be good. I don't think Dora has made a great deal of impact yet on the choices that are academics are making.

0:34:29.830 --> 0:34:42.180
Shahenda Shehata
Do you have a personal experience, whether a good experience or a bad experience, a personal one with the REF or the TEF, maybe in your early career stage your middle to mature career stage?

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In terms of TEF I'll be honest and say TEF I've been less involved with. I was involved with TEF as a Dean but that was more monitoring at a kind of organizational level. So I don't think TEF has really impacted me so much personally.

REF, I remember great pressure, the beginning of my career, when colleagues were saying to me, you know, you've got to be submitted to the REF at that time. It was a personal submission, your personal you went in, you weren't just a number because that's another thing that's changed. Now under the new referrals under the new referrals. It's not you personally who are being submitted. Your work goes in, but you are just one of the collective numbers of people who could be submitted and so, It's a different way of doing it now. there was, but in the past there was a real pressure that if you were not submitted you would be not deemed to be good enough. You know, as an academic.

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I don't know if I've got positive stories of the REF. Not really.

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Shahenda Shehata
Yeah.

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I think also, I mean we haven't talked about KEF.

0:36:31.910 --> 0:36:32.410
Shahenda Shehata
Yeah.

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KEF has changed behaviour of academics actually because things like knowledge exchange and CPD and those kinds of activities. The only at a really small minority of academics engaged in, let's say, offering CPD courses or consulting or those kinds of activities that are measured in KEF and most knowledge exchange, although knowledge exchange can be quite broad, you know it can be disseminating academic ideas. But for KEF purposes it's more about that translation between the academia and real world effect I suppose, but I think KEF has made a difference because now offering a CPD course or a working with businesses on some kind of KTP or other, you know, knowledge exchange type activity is a bit more valued because it contributes to the KEF metrics and.

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So in some ways this I've seen this be a good thing for certain academics who maybe are not particularly research active, so they don't do well on the REF metrics, but maybe they're really good at engaging with businesses, working with businesses, putting on courses for businesses. That is what they happen to be good at. And because that is now a bit more valued by the universities, they find that their value in the institution is enhanced, actually.

0:38:48.980 --> 0:38:49.410
Shahenda Shehata
Yeah.

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I've got a couple of colleagues in my department who do that. They run bespoke courses. They run short courses and whereas before we used to be a bit dismissive of that, you know now it it's seen as a good thing for them to be doing that and it's valued more.

0:39:10.920 --> 0:39:16.890
Shahenda Shehata
Yeah. And do you do you think that the KEF gonna take the lead of doing more impact case studies?

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No, not really. I don't because I think the cafe doesn't really know what it is. It's not well defined. It's still new and it's more about. Although I think there's a relationship between knowledge exchange and impact, I don't think they're the same thing. And it seems that the REF. Not the KEF, but the REF is the part of the performance evaluation of universities, which is solidly looking at impact research impact, so I think impact is gonna stay with the REF. Not so much be part of the KEF.

0:40:12.780 --> 0:40:21.300
Shahenda Shehata
But how do you see these measures? All these measures, the REF, the TEF, the NSS impact, the advancement of the scholarship?

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I think there's been positives.

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I do think that it forced academics and perhaps more their institutions to consider why we do what we do and. You know what the purpose of a university is in modern life, especially in a discipline like Business management, accounting, economics, where it's quite closely associated with practice, society. You know actual organizations? I think it does force us to think what's the purpose of our research? Who are we doing it for? Do we have a common purpose about the, you know, the common good? Do are we're trying to change the world, so to speak. And I think that conversation is a really positive conversation, in in terms of our research and our education strategies because you know. Personally, I do believe that universities should and can change the world in some way. We should be transformative, and we can do that through research that has positive outcomes on our community or society or.

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You know, I'll just, I'll understanding of knowledge. We can also do that through education, giving opportunities to people, giving people higher qualifications, access to employment, better skills. These are all transformative things which I think universities should be doing. Therefore, I think there are some positives coming out of the REF, TEF, KEF conversations.

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If they enable us to reflect on why universities exist and what we're trying to achieve. But I think the risk is that the strategy becomes not, you know, what do we stand for? What do we hope to achieve? What do we want? What do we want our university to be?

And it moves from that conversation to a conversation which is: How can we perform better in these metrics? How do we? Where are we in the rankings? You know, and that's a different conversation that moves away from the more altruistic part of what a university should be and what it should stand for into some kind of more a kind of metricised way of thinking about our standing and performance.

0:43:59.940 --> 0:44:13.740
Shahenda Shehata
But what has led the this conversation to shift from the what we should do according to the common good and the benefit to the society, to the conversation of the ranking, the journals, the publications?

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What's led to that?

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Shahenda Shehata
Yeah.

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What's led to that is the kind of marketization of universities in the UK, so you know we're now just a business organization that's competing with every other. There is a market for students, and we're all competing in that market. So what has led to it is this kind of neoliberal ideology or governments that has opened up that market and made it into a consumer market. So we all compete on research on the research front. We all compete for student numbers and we all compete with on those on those metrics to because the higher you rank, the more students you can attract the higher quality students, supposedly higher quality students you can attract.

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You know, the more international students you can attract who are paying the higher fees, so you've got more income. So then you can give more time to your academics to do more research. And so we're behaving in a kind of neoliberal capitalist, consumerist way. We're behaving as a profit banking organizations that need to generate income and surplus in order to fund our activities and that's what leads to all this hyper competition and marketization.

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It was never like this 20 years ago.

0:46:12.330 --> 0:46:18.990
Shahenda Shehata
Thank you so much. It was really interesting. Thank you so much. May I stop the recording please?

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Sure. Yeah.