**Speaker1:** [00:00:03] All personal information. We didn't collect any personal information or ID or position or anything to consider anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. So the topic is about the extensive performance measurement in universities such as the Ref and TEF and this staff. So how does it affect you as an academic in the UK university? How does this affect you?

**Speaker2:** [00:00:30] What do you mean by extensive.

**Speaker1:** [00:00:33] Extensive like the performance measurements? Just add the REF and make some stress. You have to be obliged to this kind of performance measurement. So how do you see that?

**Speaker2:** [00:00:47] OK It depends when you are talking about so I've been here since 2010. At that time they had a different framework. Now I'll talk about REF because TEF is like very new. It's not that old. And the impact of it is still not seen. Let's say we just started with this one. The focus is on REF so far. for TEF, when we heard about it first time, there was some kind of an assessment as far as I remember, and this have been done through the university and then the university was classified as bronze. So you have bronze, silver and gold. At that point, the university rejected this valuation and they said that this doesn't reflect on what we do. And then when this has been done again, we moved up to Silver. I don't know what the situation now with TEF, to be honest. Undergrads are more affected. So since I moved to not teaching our undergrad program, I'm not really 100% aware what's going on with TEF. But we started to receive some emails about it just recently with a new program lead who was really keen to work on this and. So for REF, we used to have a different from framework. I can't remember what they used to call it. And at that point when I started working here, I was finishing my PhD and I was really not being affected by it because in the early stage of your PhD, you don't really. There's less pressure on you, on in terms of this type of performance, especially for me because I was like finishing my PhD. So part of my work is to finish my PhD.

**Speaker1:** [00:03:11] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:03:12] So for the first year it was like this. And then I think towards 2014, the deadline or the 2014 REF, that was the big impact. At that time I was teaching lots of, of teaching on me because many people has left the school suddenly. So and there was a pressure from, from the school on each department because at that time each member of staff should have some kind of certain level of output in terms of how many research papers you produce by 2014. Now, at that time I applied for an exemption from REF because at that time my family was moving from Syria. Different things. I was in a different planet, so leave me alone with this one. However, I was granted this exemption, but the whole school was in panic at that point because they weren't like really confident about the whole exercise. So and they start to engage in some changes to make the picture that they are reporting more interesting or more in their favour, basically. So what they sought to do, anybody who didn't produce enough output, they moved their contracts from a balanced contract where you have almost half of your time to do research, a little bit less than that 40% of your time to do research. They moved their contracts from balanced contract to teaching only contract.

**Speaker1:** [00:05:19] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:05:20] So on record you are a teaching only, so you are not required to provide any research.

**Speaker1:** [00:05:29] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:05:30] So what is included in the REF is basically all those who are high performers. Basically, anybody who is not performing well is excluded. So one day I was in my office, the head of department came knocking on my door. He said, Mahmoud, we have to do this. I said, Why? I'm already exempted. He said, No, it doesn't matter. Just. And he asked me to sign on a consent that I'm fine with this change. And for him, as far as he explained to me, he said, it's a short term. We will reverse it back soon after the whole this goes.

**Speaker1:** [00:06:11] So it's a gaming by the uni.

**Speaker2:** [00:06:14] It is confidential.

**Speaker3:** [00:06:16] Yeah, it is.

**Speaker2:** [00:06:20] Anyway, I didn't really care. I have a big issue in my head. Do whatever you want. I didn't really thought much about it and I took his word for it. Then after a while, he left. Then when? I can't remember what happened later, the same situation continued till 2016 for me, where I. By the way, the results of REF, we they were okay. They are good, I think in general. But then the assessors, they clearly stated that our research environment is poor at that point, and which I totally agree because I didn't get any support to improve my research rather than towards like more about pushing you and having all these systems of performance, what they call it P something performance. So they put some measures to observe you in a way and. Make sure that you have a plan to produce more. More research.

**Speaker1:** [00:07:39] What support do you mean, the support? Is it financial support?

**Speaker2:** [00:07:44] at least the head of department should come to you say, okay, what's going on? What is your research? How you can do what you need? What do you need? Do you need more time? My main problem was timewise, because I've been always teaching throughout the year, so some kind of fragmented time for me for a long time so I don't have time to concentrate on research. you are doing now. Research. And you know how it takes time to get into the issue and work on it. Any distraction will just bring you back to the starting point. So this was my issue. And in 2016, I can't remember what was the issue there. I was telling them. I think they will started to work on the next REF and then they contacted me and they were saying that your teaching contract said, No, it should be back now to the normal contract. I said, No, you are on teaching. Then I had to fight for going back, so to get the time for it. One of the issues because of the impact of REF over all people start to find opportunities to move to different places. So those who were in head of the head of departments because they have good publications, they were have like some kind of bargaining power to move to a different university. So at a certain time during the year, it was allowed for using the REF rules. If you move from one place to another place, you can't. Your research can be regarded as the new institution outcome, not the old one. So this gave like a very good bargaining power for the lecturers and the academics. So they ended up going somewhere else, having a higher salary and like a higher rank somehow. So I will see that lots of people keep moving, moving, moving from one university, another university. They stay there for a short period of time. Then they go to the next one so they can and they suddenly say, like professors who in five, six years they became professors like this.

**Speaker1:** [00:10:20] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:10:21] So this what happened? So how many head of departments? Many head of departments came over this over this time. One of them he in the appraisal We'll talk about this. He said, no, you have to have like time for research, otherwise it's not going to work. Then he wanted to free my timetable in. So my teaching is concentrated in one semester and one semester I can concentrate on my research. So that's what have been done. I think the problem was that he wasn't able to do this. When he realised that I am on teaching contract, then I had to go to the head of school and fight for it and they said You have to go through promotion process in order to go back. But then when they realised that what they have been doing is not right. Yesterday I was tidying, tidying up my stuff and I found their letter saying you are going back to balance but way immediate effect. So I had to spend like three months just negotiating with them. And then when they so when they found out that I have all the evidence, I have everything written, and then they said, okay, go back. There's no need for promotion. So since then I did some publications and so on. So the REF itself overall for me brought. Lots of unnecessary pressure.

**Speaker1:** [00:12:12] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:12:13] Yeah. So. Because research is not that easy in a way to say that, ok, by this time you have this and this and this, sometimes it doesn't work like this. And I don't work like this because when I do research, I do it because I like it. And sometimes I engage in long longitudinal type of studies and these will need lots of work. You need to go back to the participants over the years and you change your mind about it. So the data I collected in 2017, I'm still working on it up till now, and I moved it from like one like stage of interviews. And then I said, No, this should be longitudinal study. So I had interviews in 2017, 20, 20, 21 and 22, and now I'm working on it. At that time, we're looking at the impact of ERP systems on accounting. Now, what we found it is more about the accountant's career change. So if I want just to publish, I could have took the data from the first time. Just tick, tick, tick, tick, finished, send it to a journal. But I want to get something beneficial at the end.

**Speaker1:** [00:13:40] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:13:41] Clear. Which is lacking in the literature. And this needs longitudinal study. Now the REF rules doesn't favour this kind of research. Now, my colleagues, I know other colleagues who are similar way of research, they changed. They are trying to change from qualitative to quantitative.

**Speaker1:** [00:14:08] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:14:10] This was, I think, just to cope with this pressure. Yeah. For me, I, I didn't want to do this. I can but I didn't want because it is, it involves lots of unethical stuff you will end up because if you don't train get the right training, which you normally get during your PhD. You need to spend time on learning new stuff. Now, if you don't have time to do this because of other commitments in terms of teaching and other stuff, you will end up depending on other colleagues or PhD students and you lose control over your career.

**Speaker1:** [00:15:04] How do you lose control?

**Speaker2:** [00:15:05] You lose control because you are not the main person who is producing the research.

**Speaker1:** [00:15:11] Yeah. Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:15:13] And this is what happened to my colleague now. He thought he can manage with quantitative stuff, but he is not a quantitative person. He understand it, but he is not a quantitative person in any discussion. He think about things in a qualitative way, like me. In a way I did some quantitative stuff. But again, I don't just merely like take data from database and try to find any significant relationship and make a story on top of that.

**Speaker1:** [00:15:45] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:15:46] I did survey studies. Now looking at him, he struggled with this, but he's fine accepting this situation in a way. But for me he lost his identity as a researcher.

**Speaker1:** [00:16:04] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:16:07] Because he used to work on public accounting, public management stuff and now he is like everywhere. It depends on what other colleagues are doing, depends on what PhD students are available. So this is the main thing. You feel this pressure that you have to do something for. If you are not as if you are not as quick as the process. Now, with the new changes in REF, where it is not about you as an individual, it is more about a group of people. Now your contribution, the pressure is a little bit less, so you can do less within a good time and there's different ways you can contribute to the REF. So it depends on how you see how you see this. When the whole thing started, I met different. I used to be the seminar organizer. The seminar program. So I used to invite professors and I used to ask them about this. Those who are who came here, they didn't like it, but they have no power to stop it or to. Have any say against it in a way. But they expressed their discomfort with the whole thing. But also, I saw a minority who said it is a game and we have to play it.

**Speaker1:** [00:17:57] Yeah. Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:17:59] And those are now looking at it are more on quantitative type of research compared to those who are qualitative. So those who are qualitative, they don't like it in a way say because our key problem here is to collect data and data collection. It takes time. for quantitative market type of research where you have the data available for you. Just download the data that you want and you can publish as much as you want. If you are a good researcher, of course. So it depends what kind of research you are doing.

**Speaker1:** [00:18:41] Yeah, but you have mentioned that they say that it's a game and they play it how they play it. How do you see your colleagues coping with the system with a REF or TEF.

**Speaker2:** [00:18:54] for REF. I think it is it is like a group work rather than individual work.

**Speaker3:** [00:19:02] Yeah.

**Speaker1:** [00:19:03] So in in our department we had this view that we can do things as a factory. So we they have like a factory line. Somebody do something and then we collect the product and just get, get it. So it is mass production mentality, basically mass production mentality where you can find like small groups that are connected as our network and they share their research together. So they are working as a small factory. So you will see some of our colleagues, they have five, six, ten papers in one year, which is impossible for an individual to do. But what you will notice that the names are very similar. So you contribute and you might lead on one paper, but your name will appear in another paper as far as far as others. Other names will be in your paper and so on. This one thing. also applying for grants as a group. One thing also has been I noticed in the school that creating a new roles. These new roles, admin roles where those who are in this factory, they create time for their research where they can be appointed like head of, of a project, head of, of teaching, head of research, head of I don't know. And you have plenty of time to do that role which doesn't really need all that time.

**Speaker1:** [00:21:04] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:21:05] And then you take that time and use it for, for research. at the same time in terms of teaching, you will, if you are in the right network, you will be assigned easy teaching, less demanding teaching modules that doesn't, doesn't have that many, optional modules where very little number of students are there. So no headache, zero headache. And you're teaching so straightforward teaching, but it takes by the more hours on your one. So you can compare to two modules one module they will they will have exactly the same hours, but one of them is doesn't have any problems. One of them has different problems because of different reasons. So they will avoid these kind of challenging teaching and they will keep for themselves that type of teaching and that. And you will notice that that they have been teaching the same module for a long, long, long time with zero contribution to it. Even they don't update their slides at all. Yeah. So this this thing and what.

**Speaker1:** [00:22:32] Else regarding the TEF do they game. Do you try even the national survey of the student.

**Speaker2:** [00:22:39] Oh NSS. It is more about the school strategy for that and they put lots of pressure on those who are teaching in the undergrad. I used not to have problems myself because my teaching was one of the best. So they used to get like good examples from what I'm doing and so on. Yeah, but for those who are like a little bit struggling, they will have lots of lots of pressure for the NSS.

**Speaker1:** [00:23:08] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:23:10] Um, as a school you need to find a way to deal with this outside pressure.

**Speaker1:** [00:23:18] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:23:20] So what they tend to do is to try to because this will affect the demand on your degree. Yeah. Because what they found is that parents, they do look at these results and your ranking as well. So it is very, very important for the sustainability of what we do. Um, so basically what is happening is they try to make sure they have not directly, indirectly to have like positive influence on, on students responses. So we have some kind of, for example, when we were rated low on feedback. So we had lots of discussion about feedback, lots of things. What can we do about feedback? And then they ended up telling students Ok every time they give them feedback. This is a feedback. So different, different things. And it was okay. It was okay. for the NSS. Now they became more clear on what we should do. But last time we had, we didn't have very we had good overall result, but we have weaknesses and they are now trying to work on these weaknesses, how they are dealing with it now, because I've not been teaching on the undergrad for some time. I just don't know the details. But for me, I didn't have like direct pressure on me. But I can feel the pressure on everybody else. What people are worried about the evaluation the students are giving at the end of the year?

**Speaker1:** [00:25:21] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:25:22] I think there was some cases where people were changing the evaluation. I think somebody in the school, they mentioned that they caught somebody doing this.

**Speaker1:** [00:25:37] Did they change the way they teaching?

**Speaker2:** [00:25:42] I remember when all this became an issue. I think what was a big issue is when the tuition fees were introduced to the system where students have to pay for studying and I participated in different meetings about it. And the thing that I didn't like is that everybody wanted not everybody, me and others were against this. They were saying, these are customers now and we have to serve them as customers. And I was saying, okay, they are not customers. They are here to learn if they have to pay. It's not our problem. We have we don't need to make changes because we are changing the way we look at our students. They are students. They are here to learn. If we open this door for us, we will have lots of issues. But what happened? Those who were on that side, they were the winners and they became the heads of all these kind of things. We were excluded because we were very clear that we are not we are not we are not ready to play the game. So I don't want to mention names, but you can tell there's certain people who were in these positions for some time now, just because they accepted this game, they accepted this a new rules. Instead of having an argument to at least to minimize the impact, they were just they were like supporting in a way showing, okay, we can't do it. We should do it. That's fine. Now, this has an impact on the academic staff, because for some time they used to feel that are vulnerable to the opinion of the customer. If the customer is not happy.

**Speaker1:** [00:28:02] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:28:03] The university will come to you say oh why, why the customer is not happy and so on. So lots of people were really worried about it and many people started to how to say it again, try to run away from trouble modules and so on. Any module that they think that the likelihood to get a good evaluation is not that good, they will run away from it.

**Speaker1:** [00:28:40] So I shouldn't teach companies Law. No.

**Speaker2:** [00:28:42] This is this is this was my this is why I was telling you, avoid it. Avoid it because this can if you are not really 100% confident about that would reflect bad on you. Yeah. Luckily I was teaching something I like I so I didn't have any I didn't have any impact on from on this side. But my problem was that because I was like this, they start to throw all these difficult ones on me. Yeah, I do like this. I like the challenge that okay, so I've been doing it for, for some time. This is like a module that has troubles. Okay. I will, I will redesign it, I will do this and this and just turn it to a very good outcome. And that's what I've been doing for some time. Then I was mentoring others to do to do this, so I was okay.

**Speaker1:** [00:29:43] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:29:46] But at the end of the day, after you realized that others are doing something different, they are getting the reward for what you are doing in a way you are. So I spend a lot of time working on my teaching because I like teaching.

**Speaker1:** [00:30:02] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:30:03] But for them they are working on their research. And when it comes to promotion, now the university doesn't say that, but in reality there is bias against teaching and the research is more important in a way. So even if you have done very, very well in your teaching, but if you research in terms of quantity is not that like satisfying to see on paper, so you might not get you a promotion. Somebody who has like doing not very good in their teaching, they still can be rewarded for their research. So I'm talking about balanced contract. So in balanced contract, you should look at the overall performance. But what has been going on is if you have done very well in your in your research, doesn't matter what anything else. But if you do very well in your teaching, not really. You need to have something else next to it.

**Speaker1:** [00:31:12] Because that's that you are measuring that the research.

**Speaker2:** [00:31:16] Yeah there is exactly. There's more measurement for research. So they ask you what, what was your contribution for REF.

**Speaker1:** [00:31:24] Yeah. Yeah.

**Speaker1:** [00:31:26] Do you see that affect the scholarship this extensive kind of performance measure?

**Speaker2:** [00:31:31] Definitely it does in terms of pushing people to do certain things that they don't really like to do. So doing research in terms of quantity doesn't fit with knowledge accumulation. So you will find them like just doing papers, papers, papers, papers, but they don't have an agenda as scholars. Yeah. So if you, if you stop any of, of, of the, of them including professors here we have if you ask them okay. You have been you are known now for papers on gender or tell me what are the key challenges in this area of research. What are the key things for females in the board. They don't know. They say there is no conclusions. It's not clear. And they don't really care because the exercise of research is about producing research. So you can't apply for pay increase or promotion or you have better opportunities if you want to move somewhere else. It's not about knowledge and knowledge creation. Scholarship. No.

**Speaker2:** [00:32:49] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:32:51] So this is the impact on scholarship for young people. They are they are not seeing good example in terms of being a scholar who really care about producing knowledge, increasing knowledge in a certain research area. This is very worrying for me because you end up and we are starting to see this at the national level. When you go to conferences, big conferences, you will see this pattern. Now you will list less, you will see less professors who are really those who have clear contribution in their field and those who are still on qualitative research. They are maintaining this. And luckily they are in institutions where this is less they have less impact because here in our school, in our department, we used to be more on qualitative side and suddenly we had changes because for REF you need people who can produce more. So gradually we skewed towards quantitative staff, which is more convenient for REF purposes. So for somebody like me, like your second first supervisor and other people who are more qualitative, it is tough time because now the majority of our department became quantitative. So when we are recruiting, we are recruiting quantitative students. Recently there was like a grant or scholarship for PhDs and the ad for that was saying clearly quantitative candidates are more welcomed or I can't remember what was the wording was clearly they were say, okay, we want quantitative students. Now, luckily, one of the colleagues who on qualitative he looked at she looked at this, he the PhD director, and she said, oh, remember, we have qualitative colleagues. Luckily, they changed it in the last minute. But this is the direction because they think this is easier for publication, easier to fill and tick the books.

**Speaker2:** [00:35:28] this is for scholarship.

**Speaker1:** [00:35:35] For the university, does it affect the reputation of the university when the university like apply the measures? But actually the reality is different.

**Speaker2:** [00:35:45] Now what's happening is people who are not coping with this, they are just leaving the university. And the problem is the replacement is not as good as those who left. This is number one in terms of the quality of the people. You will have more people who are more in games rather than in So we have more people now. And this was a struggle for the last two years. And even during the pandemic, those who are not ready to have any contribution to the department other than their research because they know this is the way forward for them.

**Speaker1:** [00:36:27] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:36:28] So whenever there is a problem, they will disappear. They are not ready to do even doing their own stuff. They will do it with the minimum quality just to say, okay, we have done what we should do and they know as far as they are doing fine with their research, they can do they can cover other stuff, let's say, especially if they are linked to the line management. So they will be protected throughout. So if they have problems in their teaching or anything, this will be covered in a way.

**Speaker1:** [00:37:10] Yeah.

**Speaker1:** [00:37:11] But why? You see academics like lose the identity and try to correspond to this performance measurement, Why they do that?

**Speaker2:** [00:37:20] Can you say this again?

**Speaker1:** [00:37:21] Not clear why, Why the academics try to cope in in this way. The game. The game. This is. Them and you lose the identity.

**Speaker2:** [00:37:30] It is about financial pressure. So you have this job. This is your source of income, and if you don't play the game, you have to go somewhere else. So if you don't play the game, either you stay where you are. And I think you will see some examples like this in terms of their promotion or you will lose any kind of financial incentive. So it is about your source of income. So if you don't play it, your source of income, your level of income will stay as it is, or it will be more difficult to be to move around. So many people, they end up this is how it is now. We will go for it. No way. No other way. Yeah. For me personally, I created other sources of income. So I do what I want here. So when you have this kind of ability so you can do okay, I give the right time for my teaching. I do the right time for my for my research. I don't push myself like crazy. I have to publish. I have to publish. When the whole thing started, I used to receive telephone calls from those who know me very slightly, and they asked me, Well, what are you doing? What kind of research you are doing, we can do together, I'm doing this. And then I don't understand why they are at that point that I told you I was really busy with my family and different things, but was very.

**Speaker2:** [00:39:26] I used my answer was, okay, yes, if we if we have something of interest of both of us and there's a project. Yes, why not? We work together. But they are quantitative. I am qualitative. I used to think they don't do survey. I do survey. Strange. Why they are calling me. And then they ended up they were building these kind of networks so they can have the output, the quantity, so they can progress. This person who was calling me from Bristol at that time, he is now a professor in in Charter University. So they have a clear projection. So he became a professor here in the UK, but he has to leave to move from Bristol to another university, third university, fourth universities. So every like two years, three years, have enough publications, apply for a job somewhere else. Either you get the promotion inside, so you go to the school. I have this offer from another school. If you don't give it to me, I will leave. So they will give it to them or they will leave to have it somewhere else. So they end up moving a lot. So if you look at LinkedIn of different people, you find some people, they just keep moving. Yeah. Yeah. And with each move there is a promotion. I don't, I don't I didn't like to do this because I like to stay the same place. Yeah. So yeah, so many people now, they think this is how it is now.

**Speaker1:** [00:41:05] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:41:06] And, and they find it strange. Now I'm supervising other students who are doing they were with me in their undergrad, so when they came here they asked me to be in their PhD supervision I the third supervisor so I don't really and they ended up doing quantitative.

**Speaker1:** [00:41:37] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:41:38] Now there's different things they are doing I don't agree with and I argue against it. Then my colleagues who are on the other side, they say this is how it is. I say it's not logical, not doesn't bring us any knowledge or anything. They said yes, Och, but this is trend, this is a trend now and this is how it is measured because a very complex thing is measured with one measure, which is and the solution for it is to do a qualitative study clearly, but they keep doing it as quantitative and they ended up like having journals, highly ranked journals that accept this because the people in these journals are. Same mentality. So it became like a big network.

**Speaker1:** [00:42:31] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:42:32] Yeah. So in terms of scholarship, there's lots of papers but very little conclusions in our area in accounting. So this is why I**, I, I now, I'm not my it's not my ambition to publish in accounting journals. I did publish. But if I can publish in other journals, non-accounting journals about accounting and accountants, it will be more easy for me.**

**Speaker1:** [00:43:08] Yeah.

**Speaker1:** [00:43:10] So my last question, do you see like, a solution to this issue?

**Speaker2:** [00:43:16] Uh, go back to, to, to the point where we know that education is not a commodity.

**Speaker1:** [00:43:24] Yeah, it is.

**Speaker2:** [00:43:25] This is the thing. Now, you can measure performance as we used to do for centuries. You don't need to have an external performance. Now. The whole thing is about, okay, we need customers to get these customers. We need to look good on this performance measurement stuff. One of them is REF. One of them is, is Steph, one of them is NZ's, one of them having accreditation stuff. So being accredited business school now when, when, when they decided it's important for us to be accredited with A, B c, I can't remember the abbreviation.

**Speaker1:** [00:44:09] Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:44:10] My argument was och all what they are asking for, we already do. So why we shouldn't be confident with what we do with our output. Why do we need to have that badge on? And the question is we have competitors who already had it, so we have to have it.

**Speaker1:** [00:44:28] Yeah. Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:44:29] So every few years we have all we have to go through this cycle of securing this accreditation because if you lose it, it's a big issue in the market and you might lose the, the demand on your degree. And now many, many as a PhD student, I think you have conditions what institutions to go to now using this accreditation stuff.

**Speaker1:** [00:44:52] Yeah it is Yeah.

**Speaker2:** [00:44:55] So this is all this bringing lots of pressure and then the focus move to satisfy these external and feed these external systems in a way rather than focusing on our processes, focusing on what we, what we do day to day. Yeah, Yeah. As far as the picture that we can present in that external assessment. Nice. And we can bring some evidence for it doesn't matter.

**Speaker1:** [00:45:26] Yeah. Yeah.

**Speaker1:** [00:45:28] Thank you so much. Thank you for your time.

**Speaker2:** [00:45:30] You're welcome.