



# Report

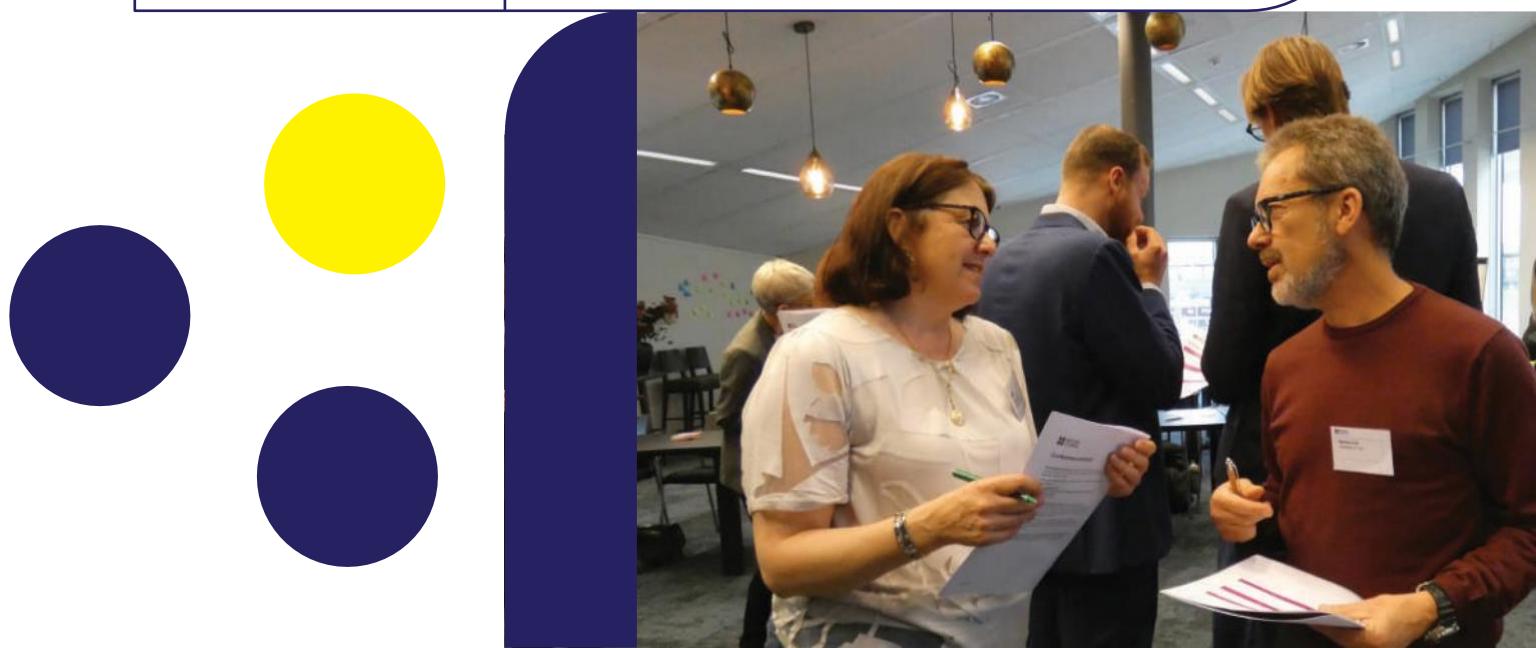
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## European Research Culture Observatory Conference 2024

**6 NOV  
2024**

# Event Programme

<b>12:00pm</b>	Arrival and registration
<b>1:00pm</b>	Welcome address and opening remarks
<b>1:30pm</b>	Workshop: Expectations setting To support group networking and to understand their current understanding of research cultures.
<b>2:30pm</b>	Gender and Research Cultures
<b>3:30pm</b>	Break
<b>4:00pm</b>	Gossip Session: A chance to share our current insights on research cultures and the barriers to progress
<b>5:00pm</b>	Closing remarks and briefing on the second day
<b>6:00pm</b>	Reception and welcome dinner



**7 NOV  
2024**

# Event Programme

<b>09:00am</b>	Arrival
<b>9:30am</b>	In Conversation: An insight into current trends in research culture in the United Kingdom
<b>10:30am</b>	Break
<b>11:00am</b>	In Conversation: An insight into current trends in research culture in Europe
<b>12:00pm</b>	Workshop: Developing a common understanding of measuring progress in research cultures
<b>1:00pm</b>	Lunch
<b>2:00pm</b>	Workshop: Building a stronger European network and the role of the observatory
<b>3:00pm</b>	Break
<b>3:30pm</b>	Final workshop
<b>4:30pm</b>	Closing
<b>5:30pm</b>	Visit to Meet the New Artists - Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten.

# Executive Summary

The **European Research Culture Observatory Conference 2024**, held in Amsterdam, brought together leaders and stakeholders in research to address the critical issue of fostering a thriving research culture across Europe and the UK. Organised in partnership with the British Council, N8 Research Partnership, and the UK Science and Innovation Network, the conference served as a collaborative platform to share best practices, discuss systemic challenges, and devise actionable strategies.

**Policy Problem:** Research cultures across institutions face systemic challenges, including gender inequality, fragmented initiatives, and a lack of sustainable collaboration. Additionally, the "publish-or-perish" ethos and institutional rankings drive competitive environments that hinder inclusivity and interdisciplinary collaboration.

## Key Findings

### 1. *Challenges in current research cultures:*

- Gender biases in scientific excellence criteria disproportionately affect women and minorities, particularly in STEM.
- Hierarchical power dynamics and toxic leadership remain persistent issues.
- Measurement frameworks for evaluating research culture improvements are underdeveloped.

### 2. *Best practices identified:*

- Initiatives such as the RESET project highlight the importance of integrating gender equity into research evaluations.
- Collaborative platforms like the Research Culture Observatory emphasise the role of interdisciplinary networks in driving cultural change.
- Inclusive frameworks for assessing research impact, such as the Theory of Change, provide qualitative and quantitative insights.

### 3. *Innovative approaches:*

- Tools like the Gender Impact Assessment checklist and workshops on inclusivity showcase actionable pathways for institutional reforms.
- Community engagement strategies, such as Research Culture Days and writing retreats, enhance collaboration and support mental well-being.



# Recommendations

## 1. *Develop robust evaluation frameworks:*

- Adopt multidimensional methods to assess both structural and cultural changes in research environments.
- Establish common metrics for gender equity, interdisciplinary collaboration, and leadership effectiveness.

## 2. *Strengthen networks and collaboration:*

- Formalise funding mechanisms to sustain cross-border research culture initiatives.
- Create regional exchange programs and thematic workshops to foster a shared understanding of progress.

## 3. *Policy advocacy:*

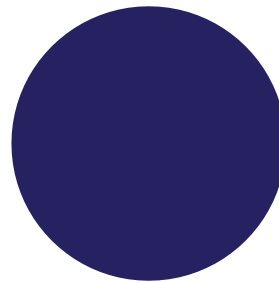
- Engage stakeholders, including funding bodies, to redefine research excellence beyond publication metrics.
- Promote the adoption of inclusive frameworks, such as EDI principles, at institutional and national levels.

## Conclusion

The conference highlighted the urgency of addressing systemic barriers to a positive research culture.

By implementing the recommended strategies, institutions can drive meaningful change, enhance inclusivity, and position themselves as leaders in fostering collaborative and innovative research environments.

Continued international cooperation will be essential to achieving these goals and ensuring long-term impact.



# Workshop: Expectations setting

To support group networking  
and to understand their current understanding  
of research cultures

Participants were invited to write down questions on sticky notes, representing key areas they hoped the conference would address. The questions were then categorised into themes such as Actions, Learning, Measurement, and Networking. This activity, followed by discussion, served as an initial assessment of their current understanding of research cultures and provided insight into common challenges and aspirations.

## Actions

*Participants highlighted the importance of expanding opportunities for diverse research careers and fostering collaboration among researchers. They emphasised the need to promote awareness of the value of research culture among all stakeholders, including leaders and policymakers. A key point of discussion revolved around identifying accountability for shaping and implementing ideal research cultures.*

## Learning

*The workshop underscored the necessity of developing platforms for sharing resources, tracking initiatives, and making research data more accessible. Behavioral science approaches were discussed as a potential framework to study and influence cultural change within research settings. Learning from both successful and unsuccessful interventions in different countries was identified as a priority to develop evidence-based strategies for improvement.*

## Measurement

*Attendees recognised the challenge of measuring improvements in research culture. They called for methodologies that could effectively capture both quantitative and qualitative aspects of change. Suggestions included leveraging expertise in knowledge metrology to enhance the assessment of institutional research cultures. There was also a focus on the need for reliable metrics to evaluate what constitutes a “good” research culture, balancing subjective perceptions with objective indicators.*

## Network

*Network: Participants emphasised the need to create a robust and sustainable network that could support the research community. Furthermore, questions were raised about how to build and maintain a meaningful community that promotes interdisciplinary collaboration and the sharing of expertise. The group also considered how best to incorporate insights from international contexts and ensure the network reflects diverse perspectives and priorities.*



The second part of the workshop introduced the *Globingo Sheet* activity, a networking game designed to encourage participants to connect with each other and expand their professional networks in a more informal setting.

Each participant received a booklet containing a series of questions aimed at discovering shared interests, experiences, and expertise among attendees.

The goal of Globingo was for participants to find individuals who could answer the questions listed in the booklet, engaging them in conversation to uncover common ground. The first person to collect answers for all the questions would be declared the winner, adding a fun, competitive element to the networking process.



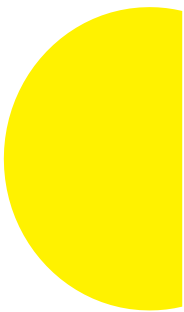
# The Tree Game

The final part of the workshop was an interactive activity known as The Tree Game. This exercise invited participants to visualise the resources, tools, and outcomes essential to achieving their collective goals in building a thriving research culture. In this exercise, each part of the tree symbolised a different aspect of goal attainment:

The foundational "**roots**" identified by participants included psychological safety, teamwork, a clear definition of problems and shared scope, diversity of expertise, and natural international links. They emphasised the importance of position and vision, awareness of broader networks and other practices, motivation and drive to support change, and a deep understanding of research challenges. Additional roots highlighted included experience in influencing science policy, individual expertise, and insights into different cultures to create a rich and inclusive foundation for a thriving research culture.

For the "**trunk**," representing the tools and actions required to achieve their goals, participants stressed the need for working groups, responsible leadership, capacity building, and fostering meaningful conversations. They also called for empowerment, exchange discussions, collaboration, and a strong commitment to shared values, as well as respect for the contributions of all individuals involved.

The "**leaves**," symbolising the outcomes, reflected aspirations such as building a comprehensive overview of research cultures, strengthening commitment to shared purposes, and establishing effective dissemination strategies for outputs and insights. Participants hoped for recognition of the diverse range of researchers' roles, generation of new ideas and innovations, and a shift toward collaboration over competition. They also aimed to encourage better integration of researchers across cultures, promote international mobility, and foster cross-sector engagement within universities. Outcomes also included stronger relationships, enhanced knowledge sharing, and actionable steps with clear accountability to ensure these ambitions are realised.





# Gender and Research Cultures

Marion Paoletti - Professor of Political Science, University of Bordeaux, presenting tools for gender equality



The speaker, a political science professor and project coordinator from the University of Bordeaux, presented the outcomes of a European-funded project called **RESET** (Redesigning Equality and Scientific Excellence Together). This project, a collaboration of seven universities, focuses on addressing gender biases within the concept of scientific excellence. RESET questions the claim to neutrality in scientific merit, highlighting how current evaluation systems disadvantage women.

The speaker argued that scientific excellence is driven by performance metrics and international rankings, which prioritise research over teaching and encourage competition. From a feminist perspective, such metrics, including publication rates and international mobility, disproportionately impact women. Women face barriers due to societal expectations and responsibilities, such as family obligations, which limit their capacity to meet the established benchmarks of scientific productivity and internationalisation. This gap widens significantly at mid-career stages, particularly around age 43, when family responsibilities peak, after which, the number of publications tends to converge between men and women, showing that women are more inclined to publish when they have more time, and, in particular, when they are freed from domestic and family constraints.

The speaker further discussed Kathrin Zippel's work, which shows that internationalisation often favours privileged groups. For many women, especially those with family commitments, the expectation to work abroad is difficult. Such international criteria are vague and, in practice, often emphasise achievements in Western contexts, especially the United States. Similarly, success in obtaining research funding, a quality seen as masculine, often favours men, particularly in STEM fields. This creates a "Matthew effect" where existing advantages accumulate for those already privileged, leaving women and minorities marginalised, as highlighted by the "Matilda effect," which refers to the undervaluing of women's contributions in science.

RESET aims to create institutional changes across universities to foster gender equity in academic recognition. The project advocates for a more inclusive concept of excellence, promoting a broader understanding of academic excellence that values teaching alongside research. The initiative includes reforms in research, human resources, and data handling, and it has produced a joint statement on equity, diversity, and excellence in research. This statement, available online, outlines new indicators for a more inclusive academic culture.

# Gender and Research Cultures

Mervi Heikkinen - Senior Lecturer and Researcher in Education, University of Oulu



Mervi Heikkinen is Senior Lecturer and Researcher in Education at the University of Oulu, and Adjunct Professor in Gender Studies at the University of Lapland. In her speech, she outlined the significant work achieved in a four-year European Commission-funded project focusing on the integration of sex, gender, and intersectionality dimensions in research and academia. It involved creating tools and guidelines to integrate sex and gender perspectives, particularly in the design of research activities and outputs. This aspect is essential because many academic publications and research, especially within STEM and medicine, traditionally lack gender sensitivity.

Studies indicate that less than 2% of research published in specific periods has included sex or gender analysis, a deficit that affects research objectivity and applicability. Mervi referenced Londa Schiebinger's work with the European Commission, which demonstrated the value of sex and gender analysis in research, as well as a bibliometric study by Rachel Herbert and colleagues that highlighted the gaps in addressing Sustainable Development Goals with gender-specific research insights.

Mervi shared the practical steps and tools developed within the project, including a Gender Impact Assessment tool with an online checklist, which guides researchers through evaluating sex and gender aspects at various stages of their research projects. The aim is to mainstream these dimensions in academia, making research outputs more inclusive and socially relevant. This checklist, which aligns with European Commission standards, is accessible online, along with additional training resources available until year-end.

A major achievement Mervi celebrated was the introduction of gender-responsive content in academic programs, inspired by initiatives like those at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. Their model includes gender content across 120 programmes, which fosters awareness among students and programme designers.

The speaker closed by stressing that research funding bodies, like the European Commission, play an important role in promoting gender-responsible research. The push for gender equality plans within research institutions is also changing organisational cultures. Mervi highlighted that academic journals are evolving to include sex and gender dimension in publications according to SAGER guidelines, further supporting this transformation, the project team has shared their insights in a recent blog post from Oulu University, which provides additional information on these developments in research culture.

# Gossip session



The "**Gossip Session**" workshop aimed to promote a shared understanding of research culture by focusing on the themes of People, Culture, and Talent. Revisiting insights from the first Research Culture conference in Manchester in 2023, participants explored important elements for cultivating a positive research environment and aligning perspectives on "research culture."

Through interactive group discussions, they identified shared challenges across organisations and cultures, examined topics like valuing time, addressing power dynamics, and mitigating the "leaky pipeline," and considered whether terms like "People" and "Talent" should remain distinct. Using an informal "gossip" approach, the workshop encouraged explicit exchanges about often-overlooked insights, enabling participants to address sensitive topics in a safe space and adapt existing frameworks to reflect emerging issues.

Participants emphasised that current understandings of research culture require revision, advocating for a unified approach across institutions while recognising unique challenges at different levels (departmental, national, etc.). Leadership and evaluation emerged as critical to encouraging supportive environments, while issues like work-life balance and career stigma in non-academic paths were highlighted as barriers to attracting and retaining talent. The session set the stage for actionable steps toward building a more positive, inclusive research culture.





# In Conversation:

An insight into current trends  
in research culture in the United Kingdom

*Stijn Mertens, Lancaster University*

*Jane Macnaughton, Durham University*

*Candy Rowe, Newcastle University*

*Joanna Thornborough, The British Academy*

The panel discussion brought together distinguished speakers from diverse UK institutions to address crucial aspects of research culture and its evolution. The focus was on sharing institutional affiliations and roles to provide context for the expertise and perspectives they would bring to the dialogue. The objective was to explore best practices, challenges, and innovative approaches within the scope of research culture and its impact on academia.

Stijn Mertens is a Professor of Chemistry at Lancaster University and serves as the Academic Director of Research Culture. His role, split equally between his professorship and this directorship, involves overseeing the implementation of a research culture action plan. This plan was developed collaboratively over two years and is aimed at fostering community discussions about improving research practices and addressing challenges like limited budgets and short-term contracts.

Jane Macnaughton is the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research at Durham University and a professor of medical humanities. She leads initiatives stemming from a major consultation conducted with the university community to shape the vision and actions for research culture. She also heads a Wellcome Trust-funded project focused on reimagining research governance to enhance engagement and decision-making in research structures.

Candy Rowe, Dean of Research, Culture, and Strategy at Newcastle University, is an academic specialising in animal behavior and cognition. Her role centers on co-creating and implementing an action plan for research culture through community consultation. Candy oversees six major projects, including "Behavior Matters" and "Reimagining Leadership," and facilitates open research and research integrity initiatives. She also manages Newcastle's Wellcome Trust Award for leadership.

Joanna Thornborough is a Senior Policy Adviser for higher education and research at the British Academy. She focuses on research culture, careers, and frameworks such as open access and the Research Excellence Framework (REF). The British Academy supports the arts, humanities, and social sciences through grants, fellowships, and policies. Joanna emphasises co-creating policies with the academic community as well as initiatives such as the Academy's Additional Needs Fund to provide targeted support for researchers.



# Tangible Examples of Research Culture Projects

## Stijn Mertens

- Research Culture Day: Organised a day to promote open discussions on research culture, attracting over 150 attendees. Plans to expand this initiative to include regular "Research Culture Cafes".
- Community engagement: Facilitated faculty-level consultations to gather input on the research culture action plan.

## Jane Macnaughton

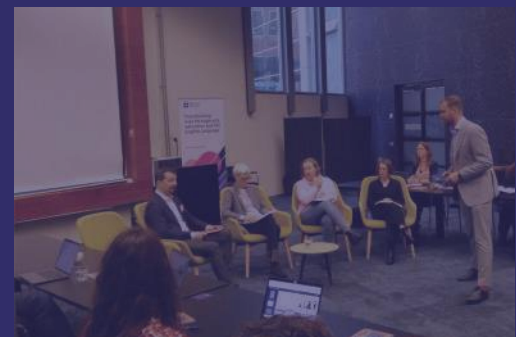
- Technician engagement: Initiated efforts to include technical staff on major university committees and led the Technician Commitment Group.
- Time management: Established a workload group to address time constraints for academic and support staff.
- Wellcome Trust project: Focused on enhancing engagement and decision-making through shadow committees and governance reforms.

## Candy Rowe

- Action plan projects: Six priorities include improving leadership, open research, and releasing time for research-related activities.
- Research space platform: Developing an online hub for training, collaboration, and interdisciplinary opportunities.
- Writing Retreats: Introduced retreats to provide dedicated time for research, later expanded to more inclusive, one-day sessions.

## Joanna Thornborough

- Additional Needs Fund: A grant initiative for researchers requiring extra support, such as caregiving or specialised equipment.
- Research Careers Programme: Addressed career mobility and identity in arts and humanities through surveys and workshops.
- Open Access Advocacy: helping to prevent a potentially detrimental expansion of open access requirements in REF, safeguarding disciplines' sustainability.



# Challenges

The panelists highlighted a range of systemic, organisational, and cultural challenges impacting research culture. One prominent issue is **siloesation**, where efforts to improve research culture are often fragmented across departments, resulting in misaligned initiatives. Additionally, **time constraints**, driven by **high workloads** and **administrative demands**, leave little opportunity for meaningful research activities.

Securing **engagement and buy-in** from senior leaders, departments, and skeptics further complicates the implementation of research culture initiatives. **Resource allocation** poses another challenge, as **uneven funding** leads to disparities in the ability to effectively execute projects. Finally, **measurement difficulties** arise in defining and assessing intangible aspects of research culture, such as collegiality, making it hard to gauge progress in this area.

## Audience Questions and Answers

 Does it help to remain an active academic while leading these initiatives?

**Stijn:** “Yes, maintaining an academic presence ensures credibility and connection with the research community.”

**Candy:** “Splitting time between academic and administrative roles helps foster dialogue and demonstrate actionable leadership.”

 How are these initiatives funded, and how do you measure their effectiveness?

**Jane:** “In England, Research England provides funding, while some universities make independent investments.”

**Joanna:** “Measuring impact includes quantitative metrics (e.g., diversity in applications) and qualitative assessments like feedback and community sentiment.”

 What role do leadership and national policies play?

**Candy:** “National strategies like the People and Culture Strategy influence universities to prioritise research culture. Visible leadership at all levels is crucial for success.”



# In Conversation:

An insight into current trends in research culture in Europe

*Stefan Penders - Universities of the Netherlands*

*Roberto Buccione - Vita-Salute San Raffaele University, Milano*

*Manon Godbille - University of Liege*

*Colleen Thomas - University College Dublin*

*Stefan Penders*, representing Universities of the Netherlands and the Dutch Research Council (NWO) shared insights into collaborative policy-making among Dutch universities and his involvement in the national programme 'Recognitions & Rewards'.

*Roberto Buccione*, Director of Research Development at San Raffaele University, Milano, detailed his extensive work on PhD programmes, early-career researcher support, and policies addressing responsible research innovation and governance.

*Manon Godbille* from the University of Liège highlighted her dual roles in research administration and gender equality advisory, emphasising her efforts in creating inclusive policies for international researchers.

*Colleen Thomas*, as Research Culture and Engagement Manager at University College Dublin, discussed the intersection of research culture with well-being and assessment metrics, sharing her university's survey-driven approach to enhancing research ecosystems.





## Best practices in academic career development

One of the central themes was the development of specific career paths for academics, as explained by Stefan. Since 2019, Dutch universities and science funders developed new frameworks to value diverse contributions, such as teaching and societal impact, alongside research, as part of the 'Recognition & Rewards' programme. This initiative has led to the development of more open career trajectories, offering academics the flexibility to focus on areas of their interest while maintaining research as a core element. Implementation challenges, including engaging mid-level university leaders and avoiding rigid categorisation of roles, were acknowledged.

## Research culture in European contexts

Roberto and Manon discussed how European institutions are addressing research culture without explicitly labeling it as such. Roberto highlighted the use of frameworks like the European Commission's Responsible Research Innovation to incorporate open science, governance, and diversity. Manon shared efforts at the University of Liège to foster inclusivity through participative gender equality boards and harassment awareness campaigns, stressing the importance of transparency and mandatory training to shift cultural norms.

## Mental health and well-being in research

Colleen emphasised the link between research culture and mental health, supported by data collected through surveys and focus groups at University College Dublin. Stress, loneliness, and the systemic exploitation of researchers' passion were identified as critical issues. Initiatives such as well-being-focused training and interdisciplinary networks were proposed to create more supportive environments.

## Addressing bullying and toxic leadership

Roberto shed light on the persistent bullying culture in clinical and biomedical research, which perpetuates hierarchical toxicity. He underscored the difficulty of challenging entrenched behaviors among senior academics and highlighted interventions like support systems for PhD students and mandatory leadership training. These efforts aim to break cycles of abuse and promote healthier supervisory practices.

## Systemic challenges and funding

The discussion also touched on the broader systemic issues impacting research culture. The panel identified competitive funding models and assessment systems reliant on quantitative metrics as contributors to a toxic environment. They advocated for revising these frameworks to prioritise collaborative, leadership-focused, and interdisciplinary contributions.



# Workshop:

## Developing a common understanding of measuring progress in research cultures

*What methods have you used for evaluation?*

*Do you have an example of evaluation?*

*What does measuring progress look like to you?*

The workshop focused on developing a shared understanding of how to measure progress in research cultures, addressing challenges in balancing qualitative and quantitative approaches. Participants highlighted skepticism toward traditional metrics, the subjectivity of narratives, and the risks of survey fatigue. Emphasis was placed on creating meaningful evaluations that capture the complexity of research environments while fostering sustainable, equitable cultures.

Key methods discussed included narratives as a qualitative tool and frameworks like the Theory of Change, which provide structured but adaptable approaches to measuring progress. Various assessment methods, such as 360-degree reviews, CV-type frameworks, and institutional reporting, were discussed. Participants stressed the importance of multidimensional evaluations that reflect diverse priorities, from structural changes (e.g., gender equity) to cultural shifts (e.g., collaboration, well-being).

Examples of effective practices included monitoring gender and pay gaps, using anonymous reporting to build trust, and fostering collaboration through cross-disciplinary initiatives. Progress was defined not just by research outputs but by creating environments that support well-being, equity, and inclusivity. Evaluation was seen as a driver for change, with feedback loops crucial for refining and improving approaches.

The group called for co-creation between institutional staff and academics to ensure evaluation methods align with shared values. They recommended combining qualitative and quantitative tools, improving survey design, and prioritising transparency and collaboration. They concluded that an iterative, spiral approach to developing evaluation methods, combining both quantitative and qualitative measures, is essential for creating meaningful progress in research culture evaluation.



# Workshop:

## Building a stronger European network and the role of the Observatory

*What is the problem?*

*What is the  
action/project? What will  
success look like?*

The session aimed to identify actionable steps for strengthening European efforts in fostering a positive research culture. It was designed as an interactive and collaborative workshop, encouraging participants to contribute their ideas and prioritise collective goals for future initiatives.

The workshop began with a brainstorming activity where attendees were invited to write their suggestions for potential actions on sticky notes. Following this, participants reviewed the suggestions collectively and selected the top three ideas they believed to be most impactful.

Several key actions emerged as priorities during the session. One prominent idea was the need to secure funding to formalise the network, which would provide resources for future meetings, practice-sharing opportunities, and the creation of reports. This formalisation was seen as essential to establishing a sustainable structure for collaboration. Additionally, participants emphasised the importance of engaging a European organisation to sponsor the Observatory, ensuring consistent support for its initiatives.

Another significant proposal was to develop surveys to better understand research culture across regions. To this end, attendees suggested creating a “question bank” that would enable standardised and meaningful data collection. Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) also featured strongly in the discussions, with participants advocating for focus groups to raise awareness and address EDI challenges in research environments. Other ideas included conducting regional visits to observe research cultures firsthand and organising exchange programmes to foster collaboration and share best practices.





## Final Workshop

The final workshop of the conference focused on actionable steps to improve research culture, with participants addressing four main goals: arranging funding, organising themed workshops and training, improving communication and toolkits, and addressing equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). Divided into groups, attendees discussed specific strategies and shared their conclusions.

Funding was emphasised as vital for sustaining initiatives, while short, recurring workshops were proposed to focus on practical themes like inclusivity, recognising diverse contributions, and fostering cultural change. Communication tools, such as an online repository for sharing case studies and best practices, were also highlighted as essential for collaboration and accessibility. EDI discussions included strategies to address power dynamics and promote inclusivity within academic institutions.

Participants explored innovative approaches, including gamifying discussions to engage academics creatively and forming ambassador networks to promote research culture in less-developed areas. The importance of influencing policy by engaging key stakeholders, such as funding bodies, was also noted. The workshop concluded with reflections on the need for community-driven efforts, supported by external facilitators like the British Council, and a call for continued international collaboration and resource sharing.





# Conclusion

The European Research Culture Observatory Conference underscored the critical need for collective efforts to transform research cultures across Europe and beyond. Across two days, participants engaged in discussions and workshops that tackled pressing challenges, such as gender inequality, fragmented initiatives, and systemic barriers to collaboration, while sharing innovative tools and strategies to foster inclusivity and sustainability.

The event concluded with a clear recognition of the progress achieved and the urgent need for further action. The actionable commitments made during the conference, from developing shared evaluation methods to advancing interdisciplinary cooperation, highlight the determination to address these challenges.

This conference set a transformative agenda for the future. Through continued collaboration and collective leadership, the academic community is well-positioned to create a resilient and innovative research culture that will benefit society at large.

