

Editorial, Volume 13, Issue 3:

Research Culture 2026

Michelle Devereaux

Institute of Advanced Study, Warwick, UK

Correspondence: michelle.devereaux@warwick.ac.uk

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/michelle-devereaux-film/>

ORCID: [0000-0003-4609-6477](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4609-6477)



Copyright notice: This article is issued under the terms of the **Creative Commons Attribution License**, which permits use and redistribution of the work provided that the original author and source are credited.

You must give appropriate credit (author attribution), provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Introduction

Welcome to the thirty-fifth edition of *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*. This issue marks our third collaboration with the University of Warwick's National Centre for Research Culture, which organises and hosts the university's annual International Research Culture Conference (IRCC) on which this issue is based. Our previous Research Culture issues, published in 2024 and 2025, have proven to be some of the most popular and downloaded issues we have ever produced. At this point, we consider our Research Culture issue an annual tradition, one we hope to continue for the foreseeable future.

The collaboration makes sense since the mission of the IRCC and that of *Exchanges* could not be more aligned. Each year, the conference brings together a wide range of researchers for fruitful interdisciplinary discussions about how to improve research culture as a whole while providing opportunities to inspire further research connections, both key mandates for the journal too. This issue, Research Culture 2026, features submissions inspired by 2025's IRCC and is published to coincide with this year's conference, held 23 September in Coventry, UK. Conference participants were encouraged to submit expressions of interest following the event, many of which became the papers you will read in this edition. The issue focuses entirely on Critical Reflections, although we hope to publish a special section of long-form, peer-reviewed articles on research culture in an upcoming issue of *Exchanges* as well. As such, the tone of this issue strikes a balance between concrete, evidence-based approaches to research culture and more personal, anecdotal experiences. We think this is generally the right approach to the subject—after all, *culture* plays as much of a crucial role in research culture as *research* does. The following section provides a summary of what to expect in these pages regarding both.

In This Issue

Inclusivity has become a major watchword in research culture as of late, and for good reason. Including a diversity of experiences and points of view not only helps researchers working on the margins to get a better foothold within the culture of an institution or discipline; it also helps to strengthen those institutions and disciplines as a whole. Mary Assad and Natalie L. Marchant's Critical Reflection offers a case in point, exploring the integration of more diverse voices into the research culture of their home institution, University College London. In 'Embedding Inclusive Cultural Change Through Community Voice: UCL's Research Culture Community Steering Group', the authors explore how the steering group they created 'integrates the individual voices and lived experiences of the research community and encourages researchers' direct participation in governance as a way to foster a sense of belonging and promote inclusion within institutional research culture change' (p. 1).

Using change-management frameworks, they detail UCL's bid to build a community-led researcher network pooled from throughout the university. Their approach helps embed more diverse community voices into governance and identifies a greater set of priorities, leading to institutional change not just at UCL, but also hopefully offering key takeaways for research networks across institutions: namely, the necessity of direct engagement with communities, the acknowledgment of their varied contributions, and structure, clarity and flexibility when it comes to diverse research culture engagement.

Precarity is of course another big buzzword in any discussion of current research culture. Ash Collins provides a Critical Reflection on the ways in which collective action can help address employment precarity in this regard. Their paper discusses the University of Nottingham's Revisiting Employment Contracts: Helping Under-represented Researchers Develop, Lead and Excel (REC HURDLE) project, which was created in 2024 as a response to the challenges of employment precarity in the sector. The project 'takes a multi-faceted approach to improving the practice and literature around employment precarity, seeking to change local culture and practice and recommending next steps' throughout the sector as a whole, via pilot initiatives (such as the pooling of staff resources and the use of bridge funding to employ staff between research funding contracts), 'root-and-branch' institutional reviews and development opportunities (p. 21). The reflection identifies many barriers to REC HURDLE's goals but also details the more practice-led and proactive response of the Research Precarity Working Group, which was founded in 2025 'for the purpose of taking collective action to reduce the level and impact of employment

precarity in research-related careers at higher-education institutions', specifically advocating and agitating for grassroots change (p. 29).

In 'Researching Research Culture: An organisational culture approach', Ruby Roberts, Jane Williams and Rhona Flin take a slightly more arms-length approach to the topic, offering 'lessons learned from organisational psychology that can be applied to the study of research culture, including understanding its underlying dimensions and enabling mechanisms' (p. 37). Originally arising from an interdisciplinary working group founded at Scotland's Robert Gordon University, the organisational culture lens, the authors contend, offers a valuable 'broader perspective' for research culture analysis, one that adopts a more quantifiable approach, specifically through community surveys (p. 39). The authors detail how they developed a pilot survey in 2021, 'in response to a paucity of validated questionnaires that capture the key research culture dimensions', which they refined in response to feedback, even including a how-to guide to developing similar research culture surveys at other institutions.

Fola Ikpehai takes a similar analytical, evidence-based approach to her Critical Reflection on research culture, in this case using the model of the 'Cultural Web' as a tool for the analysis of specifically early-career research culture. Originally developed by Johnson & Scholes as a tool for studying the organisational methods of corporate culture, the Culture Web model, Ikpehai argues, can just as helpfully be applied to an interrogation of institutional research culture at higher-education institutions.

Specifically, Ikpehai uses the Cultural Web to argue that, rather than seeing early-career research needs as complex, thorny and difficult to address, we can view them as straight-forward and even transparent. Rather, it is institutional reluctance that stops ECR culture from being improved, not conflicting researcher priorities or ECR reluctance to participate in cultural change. Ikpehai uses her Critical Reflection to initiate an impassioned call to action for systemic change, one that 'us[es] the Cultural Web model to make visible the relationship between an institution's stated cultural ambitions and its organisational mechanisms through which particular research cultures are reproduced' (p. 60).

Yanyan Li's Critical Reflection continues the focus on early-career researchers, touching on themes of inclusion and precarity explored in several of the previous reflections mentioned. In 'The Interdisciplinary Condition: Navigating precarity, identity and epistemic translation as an early-career researcher', Li ambitiously tackles all these heady themes in relation to the journey of ECRs working across disciplines. Her first-person account of navigating this complex research landscape even calls into question the researcher's sense of self, detailing both the emotional challenges of feeling like a research 'outsider', unsure where to locate

one's own research culture, and the epistemic challenges of different disciplinary approaches. For instance, she details the journey from her home department of applied linguistics, a field in which she is trained to 'view knowledge as always socially situated' to the fields of science and medicine, in which 'credibility is usually measured by quantification, by numeric data' (p. 68). While these boundary-spanning practices might evince a sense of precarity, they can also help build resilience, helping to construct a 'reflexive ethos' that emphasises empathy (p. 69).

Li also contributes to another Critical Reflection, 'Rethinking Interdisciplinarity as Intercultural Dialogue: Peer-to-peer conversations and inclusive research culture', another entry that emphasises the importance of disciplinary collaboration, conversation and inclusion. Co-authored by colleagues at the University of Warwick's School of Education, Learning and Communication Sciences (SELCS), including Prof Richard Smith, this piece considers the SELCS project 'Countering Silos and Hierarchies through Peer-to-Peer Research-in-Progress Conversations'. Specifically it looks at phase two of the project, which involved developing 'inclusive research conversation spaces' via interactive games, guided dialogues and hypothetical research tasks (p. 80). Such 'conversational interventions', according to the authors, 'can bring to the surface and reshape the cultural dynamics that underpin inclusive research practices' (p. 80). The reflection considers how departmental 'silos and hierarchies' can be combatted with conscious effort, helping to establish fairer and more truly collaborative research frameworks.

In 'Co-Creating Meaningful HEI Work Experience Programmes Through Research Collaboration', Craig Carnegie, Helena Sidgwick, Emily Birkett and Sarah Conner discuss what it says on the proverbial tin: how to create effective work experience placements for school-aged students through collaboration across universities. Specifically, the authors discuss their own informal research network, established among universities in the UK's Midlands region, including the University of Warwick and the University of Birmingham. Specifically targeting students interested in careers in science, technology and medicine, the initiative built off previously established work-experience programmes at their respective institutions.

The authors detail a specific case study at the University of Birmingham, which resulted in significant improvements to the design of the programme, informed by findings from a Warwick Manufacturing Group report recommending 'structured project-based work experience models built around defined activity types and tailored to student ability and interest' (p. 102). The group shared these findings during a series of ten-minute workshops held at IRCC2025, an experience which 'showed the value of collaboration and the importance of openly sharing' (p. 104)—a

key reason why the IRCC remains such an important event in the research culture calendar. It is also one of the many reasons why *Exchanges* plans on maintaining our own meaningful and fruitful collaborative experience with the IRCC indefinitely.

Finally, given the subject matter of this issue, I would be remiss not to address the recent death of University of Cambridge sociology professor Jason Arday, a shocking tragedy that has reverberated throughout the higher-education research community in the UK and abroad, and one that has personally affected me deeply, as I'm sure it has many of you reading this. And while it is a shock, it is also sadly perhaps not a surprise. As a neurodivergent, racially minoritised and working-class scholar, Jason in many ways epitomised many of the intersectional vulnerabilities discussed in this volume. He was also, of course, a unique individual who experienced a singular set of circumstances. Regardless of any controversy surrounding his work or life, his story is a clarion call to the research community that we *must* do better to protect and support our colleagues in physical, financial and/or emotional distress. Otherwise we aren't worthy of the name 'community' in the first place.

Call for Papers

Last month we announced the call for expressions of interest regarding our upcoming issue Navigating Precarity in Higher Education. So far we have received an enthusiastic response—again, not surprising given how relevant this issue is to so many of us in the current HE climate. The deadline to submit an abstract is **19 October 2026**. Please get in touch if you have any related questions. You can read more about the issue and the kind of submissions we are looking for and submit an abstract [here](#).

New Issue Pitches

While *Exchanges* no longer accepts unsolicited submissions, we continue to solicit pitches for upcoming issues of the journal. These can cover any topic as long as it is approached from an interdisciplinary perspective: i.e., by exploring how various disciplinary approaches work together to help illuminate the topic and create fruitful and effective research collaborations. If you have an idea, please don't hesitate to email us to have an informal discussion and receive more information on how to make an official issue pitch. To get a better idea of what we are looking for, we suggest familiarising yourself with past our past special issues [here](#).

Author fees

Exchanges is a ‘diamond’ (a.k.a. ‘platinum’) open-access, scholar-led journal, meaning there are **no fees or charges** for readers or authors. All published content is made freely available online globally (**Fuchs & Sandoval, 2013; Bosman et al, 2021**). Authors retain all rights over their work, granting *Exchanges* first publication rights during submission as a pre-requisite for publication consideration. *Exchanges* is also happy to support translations of our published articles subsequently appearing in other suitable journals, and requests only that a link back to the original piece is incorporated. Authors may wish to consult *Exchanges’* journal policies for further information on how we handle author contributions (**Exchanges, 2026**). Further advice can be found on the *Exchanges* and Institute of Advanced Study (IAS) websites (**Exchanges, 2024; IAS, 2025**).

AI Policy

Exchanges has recently updated its artificial intelligence (AI) policy. As per our author guidelines all accepted manuscripts are published on the understanding they are an *original and previously unpublished* piece of work by the submitting author(s). All new submissions undergo automated originality checking, and peer reviewers also check for signs of plagiarism and/or AI-created content. The use of any AI tools, and the method in which they were used, must be transparently disclosed.

While AI tools may be used for procedures such as background research, document formatting and data analysis, *Exchanges* **prohibits the use of generative AI such as ChatGPT for content creation** of publications, both in the creation of text and images. Authors are fully responsible for all of their manuscript’s contents and hence are liable for any breach of publication ethics or professional practice. Failure to comply with any element of this policy will be considered grounds for the removal of a manuscript from consideration, or a post-publication retraction.

Continuing the Conversation

You can find us online via the following links:

Bluesky: [@ExchangesJournal](#)

Editorial Blog: exchangesdiscourse.wordpress.com

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/groups/12162247/

Newsletter: www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/wa-jisc.exe?A0=EXCHANGES-ANNOUNCE

Contact us

For general inquiries (for instance, to discuss a potential submission), contact us at: exchanges-journal@warwick.ac.uk.

Acknowledgements

The editor-in-chief would like to thank the illustrious team of associate editors who helped make this issue a reality: Abirlal Mukherjee, Colleen Thomas, Hande Çayir, Shaoyu Yang, Dino Jakušić (congrats, Dino!), Rosie Charles and Yanyan Li. She would also like to thank issue editor Marie Sams, head of the University of Warwick's National Centre for Research Culture (NCRC) and NCRC Research Culture Officer Adele Kenny.

Dr Michelle Devereaux is the managing editor-in-chief of *Exchanges*. She is a former Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellow in film and television studies at the University of Warwick, where she also teaches screen studies. Her research interests include romantic and post-romantic philosophy, contemporary screen culture, gender and feminist theory, film aesthetics, critical neurodiversity studies, and genre studies. She served on the *Exchanges* editorial board between 2022 and 2025 and has worked as an editor for various print and web publications in North America and the UK.



References

Exchanges, 2026. 'Journal Policies'. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*. Available at: <https://exchanges.warwick.ac.uk/index.php/exchanges/journal-policies> (last accessed 9 September 2026).

Exchanges, 2024. 'Article Submissions'. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*. Available at: <https://exchanges.warwick.ac.uk/index.php/exchanges/about/submissions> (last accessed 9 September 2026).

Institute of Advanced Study, 2025. 'Exchanges Journal'. Institute of Advanced Study. Available at: https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/ias/exchanges/ (last accessed 9 September 2026).

To cite this article:

Devereaux, M., 2026. 'Editorial, Volume 13, Issue 3: Research Culture 2026'. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 13(3), i–vii. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v13i3.2658>.