Research culture – a funders perspective

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Wellcome:
Wellcome is an independent global charitable foundation.
Wellcome exists to improve health for everyone by helping great ideas to thrive
What do we do?

- Understand processes that underpin life
- Inform and excite
- Influence policy

Social, historical and ethical factors affecting experience

~ £1 billion/year
Wellcome Science strategy: ‘Improving health through the best research’

- Creating knowledge
- Strengthening research capability
- Using knowledge effectively
- Promoting an environment in which research can flourish
Our current grant portfolio

Global distribution of our funding
We are accountable to society for delivering Wellcome’s mission, while using our independence for public benefit
Ambition 2. The community is well trained, diverse and inclusive

Ambition 4. Research is carried out to the highest appropriate standards

Ambition 7. Health is improved through changes in policy and practice

Ambition 9. People have trust in Wellcome, and in science and health research
Levels at which you can intervene to effect change

- Values /beliefs
- Communities with shared interests and goals
- Organisational structures: institutional, departmental etc
- Rules, policies, schemes, etc

Look for ‘hot spots’, between, within and across levels where negative or positive loops reinforce desired effects for our own and others systems

Level of difficulty/likelihood of sustained impact

Adapted from - Johnston, Matteson, Finegood. Am J Public Health 104: 1270-8, 2014
What have we been doing?
Research Culture – Some examples:

Good Research Practice
Bullying & Harassment Policy
UK Research Integrity Concordat

Wellcome updates open access policy to align with cOAlition S
May 2019

Wellcome Global Monitor
https://wellcome.ac.uk/reports/wellcome-global-monitor/2018
PhD Programmes in Science
2017-18. Review of PhD training in Biomedical research

Multi-phased

- Literature review
  August – October 2017
- Community consultation
  May – October 2017
- Online survey
  November – December 2017
- Report
  December 2017 – Present

Full report available at: wellcome.figshare.com
What we heard:

Almost

1/2 of respondents studying or qualified for a PhD said 3 years not long enough for a research project

95% of respondents currently studying a PhD found lab rotations useful

How we responded for this call:

Commitment to 4 year support

Removed 1+3 constraint – flexibility to design the most appropriate structure
What we heard:

Areas most suggested for improvement:
- skills training
- networking
- mental health support
- co-supervisions
- career advice
- clarity of expectation

1 in 10 respondents cited inadequate supervision as a main challenge

Supervisors assess success as:
- thesis completion
- career progression
- first author paper publication

How we responded for this call:

Programmes must provide develop skills in scientific enquiry, as well as:

- awareness and skills in good research practice
- training in the principles of statistics, and data and computational skills

Directors - time to oversee the programme's activities and recognition

Plans to manage, support and train supervisors, including ECRs
What we heard:

54% respondents left project group after qualifying

Most common cited answer for one thing to change:

- increasing transferable skills
- exploring careers outside academia

Ref: Welcome Review of PhD Training in Biomedical Research

How we responded for this call:

Address students personalised development and career planning

Introduced flexible transition support fund – ringfenced funding to support student career transitions (including non-research careers)
Findings: survey data

Almost

1/2

of supervisor respondents reported seeing an increase in the number of mental health issues

Challenges cited by respondents:

- publication pressure
- lack of clarity on career prospects
- long working hours

Supervisors assess success as:

- thesis completion
- career progression
- first author paper publication

How we responded for this call:

Evidence of commitment to promote a positive research culture and to protect and support student mental health

Plan for supporting students to get timely credit for their work (pre-print servers or Open Research)

Explicitly highlight Wellcome is a signatory to DORA
What we heard:

Diversity of Wellcome funded PhD students is:

- 50% white
- 4% Asian
- 2.5% mixed ethnic background
- 0.25% Black
- 43.25% not declared

Over 1,000 reported incidences of discrimination throughout their PhD and when trying to progress.

Most commonly cited reasons were:

- Gender
- Socioeconomic background
- Ethnicity

How we responded for this call:

We expect:

- A clear strategy to recruit diverse student intakes
- Commitment to enhance and promote a diverse and inclusive research environment
- Comply with all our policies, including good research practice, research misconduct and bullying and harassment
Our programmes need to demonstrate the potential to:

• deliver excellent scientific training

• evidence and evaluate approaches to improve research culture
Levels at which you can intervene to effect change

- Rules, policies, schemes, etc
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- Communities with shared interests and goals
- Values /beliefs

Look for ‘hot spots’, between, within and across levels where negative or positive loops reinforce desired effects for our own and others systems.

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The factors driving poor research culture are complex and connected

We want to open up the conversation with
- researchers
- those who support research

..... augmenting the definition of excellence .... will not undermine the importance of ideas and outputs but put these in the context of a researcher’s conduct

Researchers pay the cost of research

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https://www.nature.com/articles/s41563-019-0443-z
Questions?

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