

Mark Llewellyn

Evidencing and  
Narrating  
Excellent  
Research  
Cultures and  
Environments  
for RAE 2026





About Me

# Research Cultures and Environments

- Conducive to the best research and innovation
- Supportive of talent
- Creative in use of resources and facilities
- Prioritised in focus
- Enabling



REF2029:  
People,  
Culture and  
Environment





# Guidance published for the People, Culture and Environment Pilot

14 January 2025

Today we have updated our People, Culture and Environment (PCE) pages with the [guidance and template](#) being used for the Pilot, and [opportunities for the community to join events](#) to discuss the Pilot further.

## Developing PCE for REF 2029

The [guidance](#) published today has been developed as part of the work to develop PCE assessment for REF 2029. We are exploring this through key projects:

- [PCE Indicators Project](#): A project led by Technopolis and CRAC-Vitae, in collaboration with several sector organisations, has developed indicators for assessing PCE. The project team engaged extensively with the research community through workshops and a sector survey to co-develop a shortlist of indicators to be used to evidence and support institutions' PCE submissions.
- [PCE Pilot](#): The PCE Pilot is being delivered by the REF team to trial PCE assessment for REF 2029. A [broad sample of HEIs](#) are taking part in the Pilot by preparing submissions in a sample of REF Units of Assessment (UoAs) and at institution level. These submissions will draw on the indicators developed by the PCE Indicators Project and will be assessed by a group of [pilot panels](#) composed of experts in research assessment and in PCE generally, within academia.



24 Feb 25, 07:00

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By Chris Parr

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## Research culture pilot could prompt tweaks for REF 2029

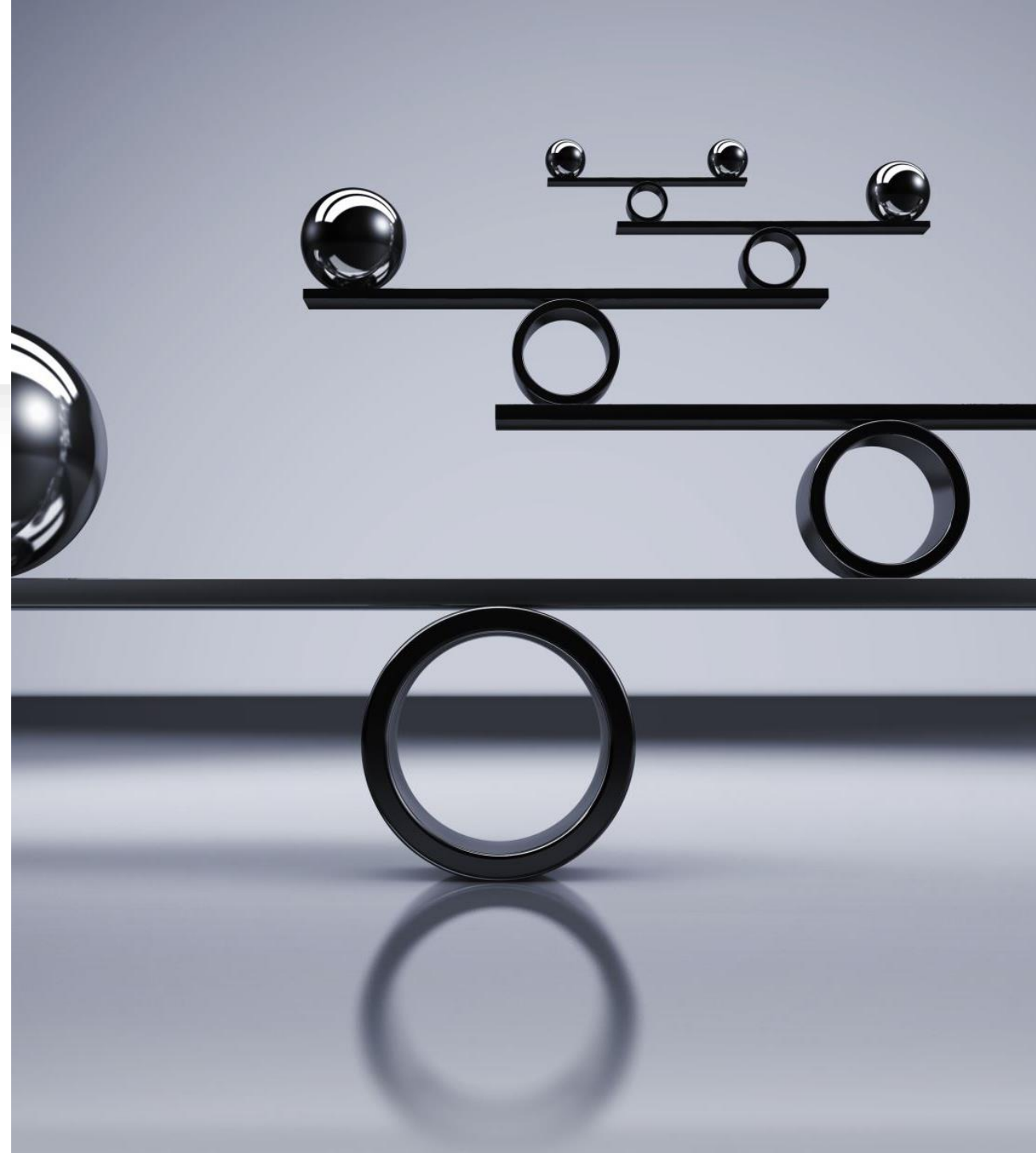
# People, Culture, Environment Pilot Model

## PCE Indicators:

- Strategy
- Responsibility
- Connectivity
- Inclusivity
- Development
- Quantitative evidence of interventions/changes/developments alongside qualitative statements

# Key challenges

- Balance between metrics and strategic narrative
- Evidence that can be counted doesn't tell the full story
- Success markers e.g. volumes of grant capture don't in themselves evidence an environment or a culture
- What does good/excellent/world-leading mean?
- Demonstrating the Unit / Institutional difference / contribution, including influence beyond own HEI





# Evidencing

## HK RAE2026 Guidance:

58. For the purpose of RAE 2026, research environment refers to the strategy, resources (e.g. grants obtained, people) and infrastructure that support research giving rise to collaborations, esteem and contributions to the discipline or research base. Particularly, a UoA-level environment submission may relate to a single coherent faculty, and equally to multiple departments, where the scale may vary or research focus be inter-disciplinary. Universities may as well depict the commonalities and dynamics among faculties and departments within the submitting unit, and show how a good research environment is provided in the submission. As scale alone does not inevitably entail a good environment, universities will have to show what they do to ensure a good environment regardless of their scale (whether large or small).

# Structures: Institutional

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- Context and mission
  - Overview: size, structure, mission, stage of development
- Research policy and strategy
  - Research
  - Enabling impact
  - Developing a sustainable research culture
  - Contribution to government priorities
- People
  - Staffing strategy
  - Development, training and support of PGRs
- Research funding sources
  - Funding sources
  - University resources

# Structures: Units

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- UoA Context and structure
  - Research and impact strategy
  - Research integrity and research ethics
  - People
  - Income, infrastructure and facilities
  - Collaborations
  - Esteem
  - Contribution to the discipline or research base



# Making Narratives Count

- Numeric data tells you quantities, not qualities
- Narrative is how you get to tell your story
- This is in your control
- Needs to fulfil requirements
- But needs to do more than just tell – demonstrating important
- Evidence is what happened - narrative is the what, why, who and how of it happening
- Clear storytelling matters

# Serendipity vs Strategy



“Culture eats strategy for  
breakfast”  
– Peter Drucker



Not just *what*  
but *why*?





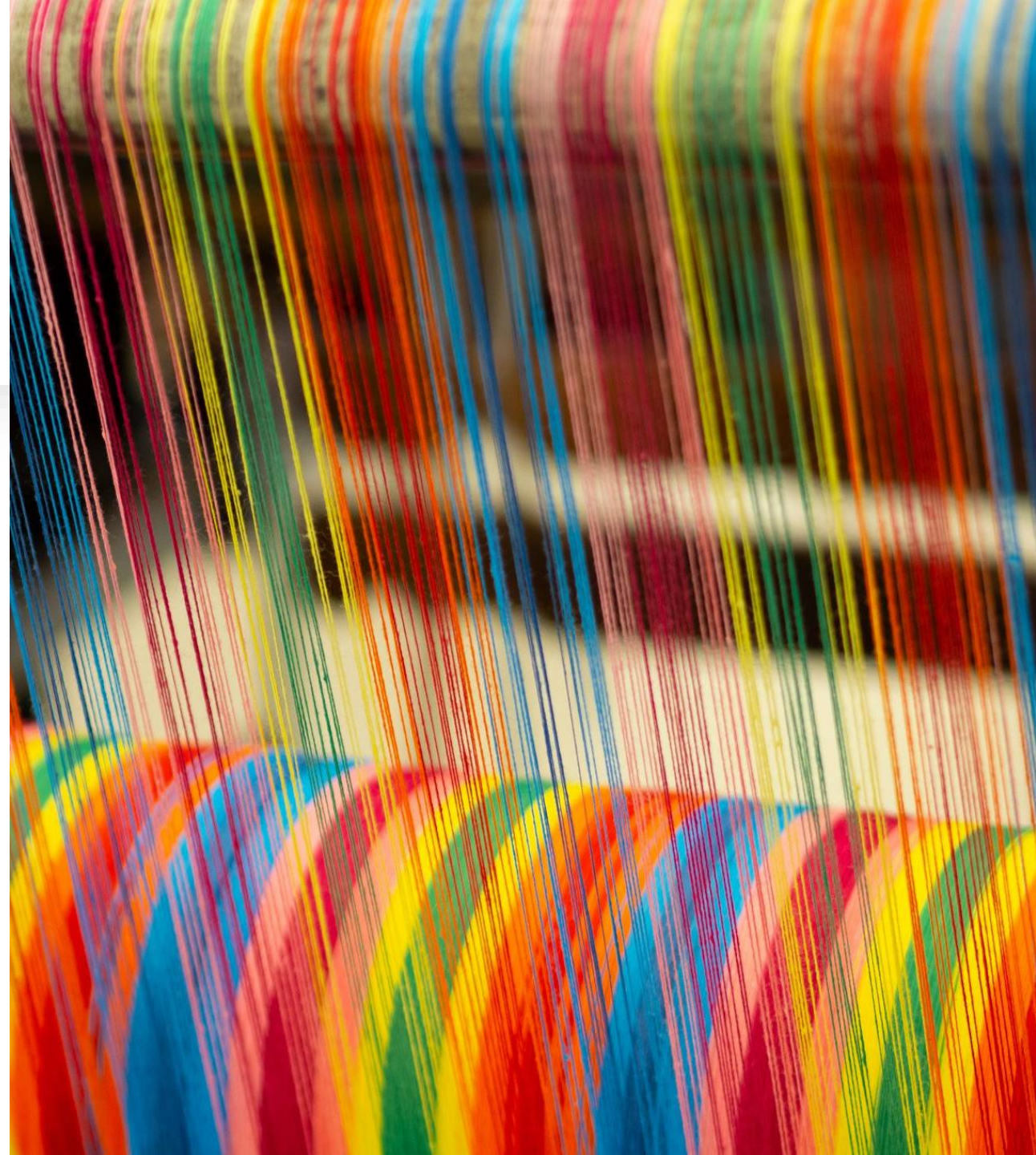
Not just *who*  
but *how*?





# Simplicity vs complexity: Narrative challenges

- Connections between institutional statement and individual UoAs
- Connective threads
- Different shades are important
- Uniqueness and distinctiveness





A glowing lightbulb is centered in the image, set against a dense background of vibrant green leaves. The lightbulb is illuminated from within, casting a soft glow. The text "Vitality and Sustainability" is written in a clean, white, sans-serif font across the middle of the lightbulb's glass. The overall composition suggests a connection between nature, energy, and sustainable development.

Vitality and Sustainability



# Vitality and Sustainability

- Narrative is within time
- What has happened (*vitality*)
  - past evidence
  - strategy and how it was implemented
  - outcomes delivered
- What is happening (*vitality and sustainability*)
  - RAE2026 a moment in time
  - Ongoing narrative
- What will continue to happen (*sustainability*)
  - Evolving but strategic
  - Future agenda and its delivery



A 3D rendering of a field of dark grey question marks. In the center, one question mark is highlighted in a bright yellow color. The word "Questions" is written in white, sans-serif font across the yellow question mark.

Questions