



Lucas, L. (2017). Evaluating Academic Research: Ambivalence, Anxiety and Audit in the Risk University. In S. Wright, & C. Shore (Eds.), *Death of the Public University?: Uncertain Futures for Higher Education in the Knowledge Economy* Berghahn Books.

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research](#)  
PDF-document

This is the author accepted manuscript (AAM). The final published version (version of record) is available via Berghahn Books . Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

## University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research

### General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/pure/user-guides/explore-bristol-research/ebr-terms/>

**Wright, S. & Shore, C. (in preparation) Death of the Public University?:  
uncertain futures in the Knowledge Economy**

***Evaluating Academic Research: ambivalence, anxiety and audit in the risk  
university***

*Lisa Lucas, University of Bristol*

*Introduction*

Risk is an increasingly important idea in contemporary societies and is often associated with increasing individualization, ambivalence and anxiety as individuals try to make sense of ever more complex and risky environments (Beck, 1993, Beck, 2009, Lash, Giddens and Beck, 1994). According to Beck (2009) we live in a 'risk society' and this also creates risk organisations, including the 'risk university' (Huber and Rothstein, 2013). The 'risk university' can be framed predominantly around the idea of 'reputational risk', which is an all-encompassing idea that creates the need for complex systems of auditing and control to protect an institution's reputation (Power et al, 2009). Universities struggle to protect their 'reputational risk' amidst a plethora of national and global rankings (see Dale, this volume) and this tension influences both the organisations' structures and the auditing mechanisms they use to evaluate the work of academics. This has resulted in what could be seen as a frenzy of audit practices. In the UK, the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) now Research Excellence Framework (REF) has been particularly important as a mechanism for auditing and evaluating research at a national level. While there are multiple influences on structuring and decision-making within academic work, in the UK the RAE/REF have acquired particular prominence.

In their research on audit and ranking systems in countries in Northern Europe, Berg et al (forthcoming) argue that, "neo-liberalism in the academy is part of a wider system of anxiety production arising as part of the so-called 'soft

governance' of everything, including life itself" (p. 1). Furthermore, Gill and Donaghue (2015) argue that there has been a psychosocial and somatic catastrophe amongst academics that manifests in chronic stress and anxiety representing the 'hidden injuries of the neo-liberal university' (Gill, 2010). This analysis chimes with my own work looking at the effects and influences of the various UK research assessment exercises since the 1980s (Lucas, 2006, Lucas 2009; Lucas, 2015) and the kinds of anxieties talked about by academics in their concerns to be included and considered successful in successive RAE/REF exercises. As the ubiquitous nature of these forms of national performance based research evaluations becomes clearer, it is important to look at how these systems of evaluation are influencing academic knowledge production and academic work. The anxiety reported in studies of academics' experiences, may relate to their positioning within this complex, uncertain and risky environment, where they struggle to reflexively mediate a meaningful and successful career.

### *The Normalising Practice of Research Evaluation and its Impacts*

The UK research assessment exercise (RAE, now Research Excellence Framework, or REF) was established in 1986 and has gone through many changes with successive exercises conducted in 1992, 1996, 2001, 2008 and 2014. It is a national system of university research evaluation that is conducted through a process of peer review with specialist panels evaluating the research work of all universities in the UK. In the REF2014, grading is awarded from the lowest ranking of 1\* through to 2\*, 3\* and the highest ranking of 4\*. A 4\* grading corresponds to research work which is seen as 'world leading'. The result of each successive RAE/REF determines the amount of research funding that is distributed to UK universities via the Higher Education Funding Councils (for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). The UK was an early adopter of this type of national system, though several countries with historical ties to the UK have also introduced such exercises though with some significant differences in terms of content, process and outcome, including Hong Kong, New Zealand

and Australia. Such systems have also been expanding across Europe including, Spain, Italy, Denmark, Portugal and Finland (Lucas, 2006: Lucas, 2016).

In my earlier work (Lucas 2006) I found there had been an intensification of the management and organisation of research activities within universities in response to successive RAEs. This empirical analysis of UK universities showed how all aspects of the research environment, research leadership, research strategy and research culture, including the socialisation of academic staff were formed in order to meet the mission of departments to increase research activities, and predominantly research that would be highly ranked in the RAE (Lucas 2009). These forms of 'new managerialism' involved manipulating staff workloads and also auditing staff outputs and achievements to determine whether they were eligible for submission to the RAE and hence considered 'research active' or 'research inactive'. Being ineligible for submission to the RAE - and hence potentially being labelled as 'research inactive' - can have extremely negative consequences for academic staff and their careers either in terms of redundancy or being moved to a 'teaching only' contract (Lucas 2006).

Non-submission of staff was an important issue in the last REF2014 as the number of staff submitted apparently dropped. This was seen to be partly influenced by the decision to further concentrate resources and remove funding for 2\* (classified as nationally excellent) and fund only 3\* and 4\* research (classified as internationally excellent and world leading). Despite encouraging an inclusive approach, the rules set down by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE ) in relation to a) not funding 2\* outputs and b) linking the number of impact case studies required to the number of staff submitted, served to encourage institutions to be more strategic in their selectivity of staff. Figures from HEFCE show that there was a small drop in submission numbers with 52,077 academic staff submitted to REF2014 compared to 52,401 submitted to RAE2008. The largest drop in submission numbers (5 per cent) was found in the humanities (THE 2014). However, there are significant differences in the number of staff submitted to the REF2014 as a percentage of those eligible to be submitted. So, for example, the percentage of

staff submitted ranges from the lowest at 27% (Education) and 33% (Allied Health) to the highest at 94% (History) and 89% (Philosophy) and a mixed range of 51% (Law), 67% (Biological Sciences) and 73% (Political Studies). In looking at the Education unit of assessment in more detail, there were 15 fewer institutional submissions for Education to REF2014 compared with REF2008 (though there were also 9 new submissions). There were 23 out of 76, i.e. almost one third of submissions with less than 20% of eligible staff submitted (Lucas, 2015). However, this data does need to be interpreted with some caution as the means of calculating 'eligible staff' using available HESA data is not without complications and potential errors (Jump, 2015a). It is a complex picture overall but there is certainly concern about the approach taken by universities in the REF2014 submissions and the potential human costs in terms of career and professional esteem for those not submitted in universities where a less inclusive approach was taken (Lucas, 2006). Although the potential negative impact on academic career is dismissed by some university leaders (Jump, 2015b), this concern with the costs to academics' careers and professional identity is at the heart of Sayer's (2015) insistence that the REF is a flawed and damaging system for judging and rewarding research excellence.

Much of the research evidence produced has been scathing of the impact on academic work and sense of identity in the new managerialist and audit cultures engendered by the RAE and REF2014 (Shore and Wright, 1999; Harley, 2002; Loftus 2006; Sparkes, 2007). Loftus (2006) has argued that there has been a process of 'RAE-ification' and that the consciousness of the academic has been changed such that 'we have built ourselves into the body-walls of the system that now encloses us' (Loftus, 2006: 111). What this means is that academic researchers and the production of research knowledge has been moulded in order to fit the demands of audit regimes such as the RAE/REF. One concern is that researchers, in their endeavour to meet the requirements of the evaluation exercise, might change their research areas or approach to those they perceive to be valued by an assessment panel. Some argue that researchers may be more likely to work within mainstream areas of research as these are perceived to be safer options than working at the margins which, may not be viewed positively

by a panel and/or may result in them being unable to publish in the most prestigious journals (Lee 2007). Others argue that there is a potential rush to mediocrity as researchers may choose to do less risky research, which they hope will guarantee them timely results that can be published in prestigious outlets. There is also an argument that applied research is less valued than 'blue skies' or basic research and this is particularly important in professional subjects such as education (McNay 2003). In short, the potential for distortion of research is high.

Other distorting factors include the intensification of academic working environments and the valuing of research activities over all other forms of academic work (Sikes, 2006). Leathwood and Read's study (2013) found that gender differences of workload pressures and time constraints were still evident, with women participants reporting less time for research due to increased workloads in relation to teaching and administration (see also Blackmore, this volume). Some respondents were considering leaving academia or considering volunteering for teaching only contracts. However, not all saw the RAE/REF as wholly negative. Some reported that they could now have their research efforts taken seriously within their departments and that the RAE/REF allowed them to have a more successful research career (Lucas 2006, 2009, Leathwood and Read 2013). This could perhaps reflect the different experiences of those who are considered 'research active' and whose research is valued and those who are not. This is also supported by more recent literature highlighting the potential positive influence as individual academics who re-appropriate these processes as a way of re-invigorating academic subjectivities (Cupples and Pawson, 2012). However, the overwhelming conclusion from Leathwood and Read's (2013) study is that despite gains for some, there remains substantial inequity in the system. Furthermore, there is significant evidence that the neoliberal process of auditing and control creates risk and anxiety for academics (Berg et al, forthcoming; Gill and Donaghue, 2015). In what follows I explore this idea of risk more thoroughly and then use it to explore the experiences of academics in UK universities in what has been described as the rise of the 'schizophrenic university' (Shore, 2010).

### *Theorising Risk in the Academy*

A key premise underpinning the theories of risk is the “disintegration of certainties” in modern societies and the compulsion to make one’s own life and construct a biography that is “self rather than socially produced” (Lupton, 1999: 73). Increased individualization within society is emphasised and greater importance is placed on individual agency and responsibility. Theorists recognise that such agency may be differentially distributed in a very unequal social world and that the ability to play a role in creating one’s biography is more likely a preserve of the privileged. However, far from being necessarily a greater freedom, this potential for increased agency can result in heightened forms of anxiety.

Risk society is thus characterized by the contradiction that the privileged have greater access to knowledge, but not enough, so that they become anxious without being able to reconcile or act upon that anxiety (Lupton, 1999: 71)

Reflexivity is central to how individuals are considered to act upon and exert their agency in weighing up courses of action to construct their life course and crucially, to ameliorate the possibilities of risk.

Because the self is seen as a reflexive project in late modernity, as a problematic rather than a given, there is far more emphasis on the malleability of the self and the responsibility that one takes for one’s life trajectory... As knowledge is being constantly revised in late modernity, the process of reflexivity is more complicated and uncertain. There are choices to be made: ‘the self, like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists, has to be reflexively made. Yet this task has to be accomplished amid a puzzling diversity of options and possibilities. (Lupton, 1999: 79)

While individuals may be compelled to make decisions in constructing their life course, they do not do so in conditions of their own choosing. Many critiques argue for the continuing significance of structural determinants like class, gender and race in determining life chances. However, where the need for the reflexive project is accepted, this is arguably enacted amidst complex, ambivalent and often contradictory conditions. The work of Lash (1993) in particular emphasises the contradictions, uncertainty and ambivalence that the reflexive self has to navigate.

People often feel, however, that knowledge about risks, including their own, are so precarious and contingent that they simply do not know what course of action to take. As a result they may move between different risk positions at different times, sometimes attempting to control risk, at other times preferring a fatalistic approach that simply accepts the possibility of risk without attempting to avoid it. (Lupton, 1999: 122)

The idea of compulsive self-reflexivity and attempts to monitor actions can be at odds with the contingencies, ambivalences and contradictions of social life. This can make calculating risk impossible or encourage what Giddens et al (1994) call a 'pragmatic acceptance' of circumstances in order to avoid potentially debilitating anxiety.

All areas of social life are potentially constructed around the idea of the 'risk society' and this can be analysed at the global, national, regional, organisational and individual level. My interest in this chapter is in the university and academics working within it. In recent years, the discourse around risk in universities has increased and governing bodies such as HEFCE have encouraged - and in some instances even mandated - universities to introduce processes of risk management (HEFCE, 2001, 2002, 2006). The use of risk management strategies has arguably been embraced and it has been seen as a "key component in university reform, refashioning universities as rational and efficient entrepreneurial actors" (Huber and Rothstein, 2013: 659). The potentially all-encompassing term of 'reputational risk' is therefore utilised to increase the

forms of audit and accountability across all areas of universities and, not least, to increase the attention paid to league tables and all forms of evaluation of research and teaching (Power et al, 2009; Hardy, 2015).

In the risk organisation, those rationalisations reach deep down into organisational life, reframing both the negative externalities and internalities of ever fine-grained levels of organisational decision-making activities and practices in terms of calculated gambles across ever more diverse areas of organisational practice. As such, risk management represents a new organisational ideology that provides a formal methodological means of rationalising the idea of failure in institutional environments of heightened accountability. (Huber and Rothstein, 2013: 671)

This idea of the 'risk organisation' or 'risk university', demonstrates how individuals at all levels can be held accountable for institutional failure through new systems of external scrutiny and internal control. The individualization of risk management is spread throughout the organisation. In universities, for example, individuals are held accountable by their success or failure to contribute to the REF. But what of academic subjective experiences of engaging in the REF process and how might this be understood in relation to conceptualisations of risk? These questions are explored in the next section through the experiences of a sample of academics working in UK universities.

### *Methodology*

This chapter utilises interviews with UK academics, following a survey of academics in research-intensive environments in six Australian and six English universities (Brew and Boud, 2009; Brew, Boud and Namgung, 2011, Brew, Boud, Namgung, Lucas and Crawford). The study explored how academics make sense of the competing pressures of teaching, research and administration and their experiences of academic work. Semi-structured interviews with twenty-seven

mid-career academics were conducted. Purposive sampling from those who indicated on the survey a willingness to be interviewed was used to select those with 5-10 years' experience beyond their doctorate in three broad disciplines (Sciences and Engineering (S&E); Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH); and Health Sciences (HS)) from three Australian and five English universities. The focus here is on the 13 interviews conducted with academics in 5 UK universities. These individuals were self-selecting and chose to take part in the interview study by indicating their willingness on the survey questionnaire. This sample is therefore not representative of all academics in terms of experience and positioning, although there is a good mix of male and female mid-career academics from a range of institutions and disciplines.

Table 1. Interviewees

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>HEI*</b>	<b>Discipline</b>	<b>Discipline cluster</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Job title</b>
Antonio	De	Chemical Engineering	S & E	Male	Lecturer
Arjen	Be	Physics	S & E	Male	Senior Lecturer
Brett	De	International Security	SS	Male	Professor
Carlos	Ge	Computer Science	S & E	Male	Senior Lecturer
Emily	Be	Law	A & H	Female	Senior Lecturer
Geert	Ge	Economics	SS	Male	Reader
Gregorio	Ce	Analytical Chemistry	S&E	Male	Reader
Jane	Fe	Criminology	SS	Female	Senior Lecturer
Katie	Fe	Law	A & H	Female	Senior Lecturer
Natalie	Ce	Life Sciences	S & E	Female	Senior Lecturer
Rosemary	Ce	Health and Social Care	Health Sc	Female	Senior Lecturer
Sophie	Be	Education	SS	Female	Reader
Stephen	Be	Computer Science	S & E	Male	Lecturer

Interview questions focused on how participants saw themselves as an academic, critical career incidents, perceived personal and structural influences in their current role, what constrains and what enables teaching and research decisions,

and their future aspirations. No direct questions were asked about REF2014 but interviewees did spontaneously bring up the subject and wanted to talk about their experiences. All interviewees were informed of the purpose of the research and signed an informed consent form. Participants and their universities have been given pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

### *Academic Risk in the University*

The accounts of interviewees show that there is much contingency and ambivalence that academics must navigate and this uncertainty can increase anxiety. The rather fraught ambivalence around the risks of research engagement and how this might affect their ability for inclusion in the REF is palpably clear. The need to understand competing systems of value in their research work is something that these academics must mediate and attempt to balance in different ways. There are three key areas of perceived risks that will be considered; 1) academics' awareness (and critique) of the 'risk university' and the auditing mechanisms and bureaucracy that this imposes, 2) academics' experiences of risk in relation to their own research work and potential inclusion (or not) in the REF, and 3) academics' concerns with the risk of having their contracts changed or experiencing redundancy if they are not contributing to the research efforts and REF requirements demanded by the university.

Huber and Rubenstein (2013) argue that the risk university is concerned to avoid unnecessary failure and to utilise mechanisms and controls to ensure this does not happen. Some academics, particularly those with experience in other systems, spoke of the 'iron cage' of bureaucracy that they saw operating in UK higher education. They perceived the university as tightly governed and overly concerned with risk aversion;

*What I personally don't like is the - what I see if you want as a philosophical attitude of the system which is working on the assumption that there is something wrong to find out. In the US system, the system is you trust and if*

*you do something wrong you get punished quite harshly I would say. Whereas in the UK and I would say, this is very - from my point of view, a European attitude, we try to prevent as much as possible, anything wrong from happening. And that entails a tight web of controls and restrictions that applies to government and applies to university (Antonio, Lecturer, Chemical Engineering).*

For many academics, this means restrictions in what they are doing and difficulties with processes and procedures. There is also a process of trying to ensure performance by processes of auditing and setting targets for performance, particularly in relation to individual's getting research funding. Such practices are increasing in UK institutions and Jump (2015c) suggests that one in six UK universities have grant income targets for staff. This kind of practice was blamed for the death of a Professor at Imperial College London and the stress that this can impose on individuals is well documented in numerous cases (Jump, 2015c).

In order to try and understand expected outcomes (and hence ameliorate risk of failure) universities may categorise individuals around expectations and as Katie explains above, failure to meet these expectations can result in a change of contract.

*Study leave isn't without its pressures. And I feel - I mean there's always the pressure to publish and there's the pressure to publish well, and at the end - for REF, for yourself, for your own career progression. So yes, I don't think study leave is without its problems or difficulties because you've always got this oh gosh I've really got to publish at the end and it's got to be a worthy publication or X number of worthy publications and be REF-able, you know, and be all those elements. So I don't think it's an easy year. It's quite a stressful year but an enjoyable year nonetheless (Emily, Senior Lecturer, Law).*

The issue of a 'worthy' publication indicates that not all publications are valued and in relation to the REF it is vitally important to achieve a 3\* or 4\* ranking. This can result in decisions being taken based on the perception of what can be

classified as a 3\* or 4\* publication leading to a shift towards the mainstream and away from less risky research (Lee, 2007).

*I think it's again creating incentives, a set of incentives that basically say, 'As long as you produce your four, three star or four star papers...' Then you see where it completely distorts where people send their work. These days you don't send your work to a journal that you think is most appropriate. You send it to a journal that you think, the panel might think, is going to be three star, four star (Geert, Reader, Economics).*

There is a risk, therefore, that your research outputs will not be considered sufficiently worthy of 3\* or 4\* rating. The procedures for judging this can be opaque not just within the REF process itself but also within internal evaluation processes run by institutions to determine likely ratings of academic research output. These internal evaluations can then determine whether or not someone is submitted to REF. Sayer (2015) has written extensively criticising these internal institutional evaluations and he attempted to protest these unfair judgements being made by refusing to allow himself to be included in the REF for his institution. These evaluations and the lack of transparency in the process can produce anxiety and stress for individual academics. However, some are also determined to ensure that they are not completely governed by evaluations like the REF and that their research work continues to be meaningful to them even if this risks not being valued by the institution.

*I feel slightly frustrated about the process because the type of work I do now with the empirical work that I'm doing, it's very focused on end reports. And end reports depend to a large extent on the funding that you've got and the organisation that you're writing for. Some are very open-ended, as I was saying. Some have to be very constrained. And unfortunately - the difficulty is what you perceive and what the research committee here perceive REF to want compared with what you can deliver based on the work you're doing at the time. And it's that balance, isn't it? It's balancing it as best as possible. And I think you can only be true to yourself and do the work that you think is*

*appropriate for you and what you think is ultimately - ultimately as an academic you want - I think ultimately I want to make a difference and I want to feel that the work I'm doing is assisting in some way. And if that means that it's reports that are potentially not REF-able and therefore I get hauled over the coals for not being REF-able but they have an impact in another sense, I'd much rather that. But that's my notion of being an academic. And if it prevents me from having some career progression or it delays it, then okay, that may be the case and I think I've probably reconciled myself to that. I could write a nice theoretical black letter article if I wanted to, and it could be a three star or a four star. It might also be a two star. But you - I don't think I would be enjoying that work as much as I'm enjoying the work that I'm doing at the moment and feel that I'm making an impact outside of academic theory (Emily, Senior Lecturer, Law).*

This chimes with my research on resistance in academic work (Lucas, 2015) and academics, despite the risks, are determined to uphold their own values of academic research work. At the same time, Emily is adopting a fatalistic approach as a way of dealing with the potential anxiety of not being included in the REF. She also highlights, however the potentially conflicting deadlines and the contradictory messages from funders and the university (with REF considerations) who want the research packaged and delivered in different formats and to different timeframes.

*But - so we've managed to negotiate that. But that was hard work to negotiate that, to get that level. So I think in terms of REF, whether that will be suitable is a question mark. It'll be - I mean the data is great data. I mean it's such new data. There isn't data like it. But whether it's in a REF format is difficult to know, whereas I think the (other) project we can - because we haven't got those same constraints on an outside agency, we can make it into the format that we want it to be (Emily, Senior Lecturer, Law).*

*Well I think it was driving my things but it's a little bit like now. So I suppose I feel a little bit frustrated by the REF because for me, personally, my ESRC*

*project, having finished in January, there's just no way my publications are going to be out in time for that. So it's great for the next REF round but it's not great now. And whilst I have enough publications for the REF, I just have to, you know, wait for the final scoring or whatever in terms of whether I'm going to be submitted or not (Jane, Senior Lecturer, Criminology)*

For Emily, therefore, the differing demands of the outputs needed on here research project means that she is uncertain whether this can be produced in a way that is suitable for REF. Whereas, Jane is concerned with the timeframe within which she is working and whether publications can be produced to fit with REF deadlines. Even when she has publications that can be submitted, there is the ongoing concern with whether these will be judged to be good enough for REF submission.

The extent of anxiety experienced can also relate to whether the immediate environment is supportive of academic research work beyond the constraints of what is demanded for REF.

*...I was never put into pressure or I was never told if you're not submitted to REF things are going to get very ugly for you; it was never like this. We're – we are positively motivated or stimulated to have a good – select the best publications and during the process... Given the latest discussions I think I will be in, I think the whole of my research group will be in and we were given a lot of advice on how to prepare, we were given a lot of motivation: Look, this is what we are looking for, we want quality not quantity and so on and so forth. So I was given instructions, I was given advice...I didn't feel under pressure; perhaps I should have but I didn't. I thought that okay that should be a consequence of my acts and not necessarily the reason why I'm doing research. And I think that's what my, the Senior Professor within my group that's what he said: REF is one way to evaluate what we do but it's not the (only way) ... our target; we are not doing research for them, we are doing research because we are good researchers and we want to do what's best. (Carlos, Senior Lecturer, Computer Science).*

It is clear from Carlos's experience that within some departments there is a lot of support and advice given that can enable researchers to plan their research strategies and activities. This can also help to ameliorate the sense of risk and anxiety as there is a support and a shared responsibility as well as a sense of purposeful research endeavour beyond the REF. This is a very different approach from the more punitive target-setting approach.

*But from a personal point of view (REF) hasn't really affected me in a specific way. I think the message we've got from the Dean and from the Department is continue to publish, continue to win money, continue to graduate students. So I think it hasn't specifically changed what I do (Antonio, Lecturer, Chemical Engineering).*

What seems to be crucial is for individuals to be positioned in a way that allows them to meet the university's goals and this usually amounts to publications, funding and successful (usually graduate) students and for them to feel supported in doing so. Oftentimes, however, academics are given targets and demands are made for specific outcomes, which can be difficult to achieve. The experiences of academics like Emily, Katie, Jane and Geert above demonstrate the risk entailed and the potential for increased anxiety when the immediate environment is less supportive and more inclined to classify, constrain and punish individuals. Those who are unable to balance competing and ambivalent demands are often put under extreme pressures of performance monitoring and face risks of having their contracts changed to teaching-only or redundancy. There is evidence of much anxiety from the academics' interviewed, particularly where jobs and careers as seen as potentially under threat.

*...so we've obviously got the REF coming up. We don't know yet who is in, who is not in. We've got a good idea, but the university has basically said that there is an expectation that we will be producing at least one three star piece per year. And there is a long, long process that you will go down if you do not produce that. And when I mean long, I'm talking three, four A4 pages of*

*procedures that the bottom line is transfer to a teaching only contract.  
Whether that will happen, I have no idea (Katie, Senior Lecturer, Law).*

*Yes, but at the same time I'm ignoring possibly the most critical and almost loss  
of my job which was, you need to do research and if you don't do research, well  
I wasn't going to be in trouble because I'm not on probation, it was, we're  
going to keep you on but you have to do this and you have to do this within 12  
months, well I haven't done it (Natalie, Senior Lecturer, Life Sciences).*

Whilst this sample of academics is small, self-selected and cannot represent the diversity of positions and experiences of UK academics, it is nevertheless possible to consider how their experiences of, and positioning within, REF2014 impacts on their research and on their identities as researchers. The structuring conditions of the institution are crucial to academic decision-making around research and the levels of anxiety and stress provoked. The concern for the 'reputational risk' of the university can result in tighter forms of auditing and control that are potentially detrimental to academic careers and ultimately research work undertaken as academics struggle to ameliorate the risks faced. Academics struggle to balance the different demands within which they are operating and live with the constant risk of threats to their research identity and even their employment. In terms of the overall experiences of these academics, it would seem that there is evidence of a RAE-ification (Loftus, 2006) and also much evidence of anxiety and stress around research work and the potential or inclusion and success in REF submission. However, this is balanced by an unflinching sense of what it is to be an academic and what is meaningful in the research work that they are undertaking. Overall, there is a continuing resistance to the constraints of evaluation exercises such as REF but also a kind of sanguine acceptance, of their inevitability.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to my colleagues Angela Brew, David Boud and Karin Crawford for permission to quote from our joint study of academics in Australia and the UK.

### *References*

Beck, U. (1993) *Risk Society: towards a new modernity*, London, Sage.

Beck, U. (2009) *World at Risk*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

Berg, L.D., Huijbens, E.H., & Larsen, H.G. (forthcoming) Producing Anxiety in the Neoliberal University, *The Canadian Geographer*.

Brew, A. & Lucas, L. (2009) (edited) *Academic Research and Researchers*, Maidenhead, SRHE/Open University Press.

Brew, A., Boud, D., Namgung, S, Lucas, L. & Crawford, K. (online first) Research productivity, researcher identity and views of research in two countries, *Higher Education*.

Cupples, J. & Pawson, E. (2012) Giving an account of oneself: the PBRF and the neoliberal university, *New Zealand Geographer*, 68: 14-23.

Giddens A., Beck U., Lash S., (1994) *Risk, trust, reflexivity: Reflexive Modernization*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

Gill, R. (2010). Breaking the silence: The hidden injuries of the neoliberal university. In R. Flood, & R. Gill (Eds.), *Secrecy and silence in the research process: Feminist reflections*, London: Routledge.

Gill, R. & Donaghue, N. (2015) Resilience, apps and reluctant individualism: technologies of self in the neo-liberal academy, *Women's Studies International Forum*, OnlineFirst.

Hardy, I. (2015) Education as a 'risky business': Theorising student and teacher learning in complex times, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 3, 3: 375-394.

Harley, S. (2002). 'The Impact of Research Selectivity on Academic Work and Identity in UK Universities' *Studies in Higher Education*, 27, 2: 187-205.

Huber, M. & Rothstein, H (2013) The risk organisation: or how organisations reconcile themselves to failure, *Journal of Risk Research*, 16, 6: 651-675

Jump, P. (2015a) REF 2014 rerun: who are the 'game players'? *Times Higher Education*, 1<sup>st</sup> January.

Jump, P. (2015b) Careers at risk after case studies game playing, REF study suggests, *Times Higher Education*, 22<sup>nd</sup> January.

Jump, P. (2015c) Grant income targets set at one in six universities, THE poll suggests, *Times Higher Education*, 11<sup>th</sup> June.

Lash, S., Giddens, A., and Beck, U., (1994) *Reflexive modernization: politics, tradition and aesthetics in the modern social order*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Leathwood, C. & Read, B. (2013) *Final Report: assessing the impact of developments in research policy for research on higher education: an exploratory study*, Society for Research in Higher Education.

Lee, F.S., (2007) The Research Assessment Exercise, the state and the dominance of mainstream economics in British universities, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 31, 309-325.

Loftus, A. (2006) Rae-ification and the Consciousness of the Academic, *Area*, 38, 1: 110-112.

Lucas, L. (2006) *The Research Game in Academic Life*, Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill/Open University Press.

Lucas, L. (2009) Research Management and Research Cultures: power and productivity in Brew, A. & Lucas, L. (eds) *Academic Research and Researchers*, Buckingham: SRHE/Open University Press.

Lucas, L. (2015) Academic Resistance in the UK: challenging quality assurance processes in higher education, *Policy and Society*, 33: 215-224. Invited Contribution to Special Issue: Regulating Higher Education: Quality Assurance and Neo-Liberal Managerialism in Higher Education - A Global Perspective.

Lucas, L. (2016). Performance-based Research Assessment in Higher Education. *Oxford Bibliographies in Education*.

Lupton, D. (1999) *Risk*, London, Routledge.

McNay, I. (2003). "Assessing the Assessment: an analysis of the UK Research Assessment Exercise, 2001, and its outcomes, with special reference to research in education." *Science and Public Policy* 30(1): 1-8.

Power, M, Scheytt, T, Soim, K. & Sahlin, K. (2009) Reputational Risk as a Logic of Organizing in Late Modernity, *Organization Studies*, 30, 02&03: 301-324.

Sayer, D. (2015) *Rank Hypocrisies: the insult of the REF*, London: Sage.

Shore, C. & Wright, S. (1999) Audit Culture and Anthropology: Neo-Liberalism in British Higher Education, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 5, 4: 557- 575.

Shore, C. (2010) Beyond the Multiversity: neoliberalism and the rise of the schizophrenic university, *Social Anthropology*, 18, 1 15–29.

Sparkes, A. (2007) Embodiment, academics and the audit culture: a story seeking consideration, *Qualitative Researcher*, 7: 521-550.