Research
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Research Offices of the Future

Insights from two Research Professional News surveys on the changing nature of research services around the world

- Priorities and change drivers
- Measuring societal impact
- Role of artificial intelligence
- Research integrity
- Impact of US policy
- Research office challenges
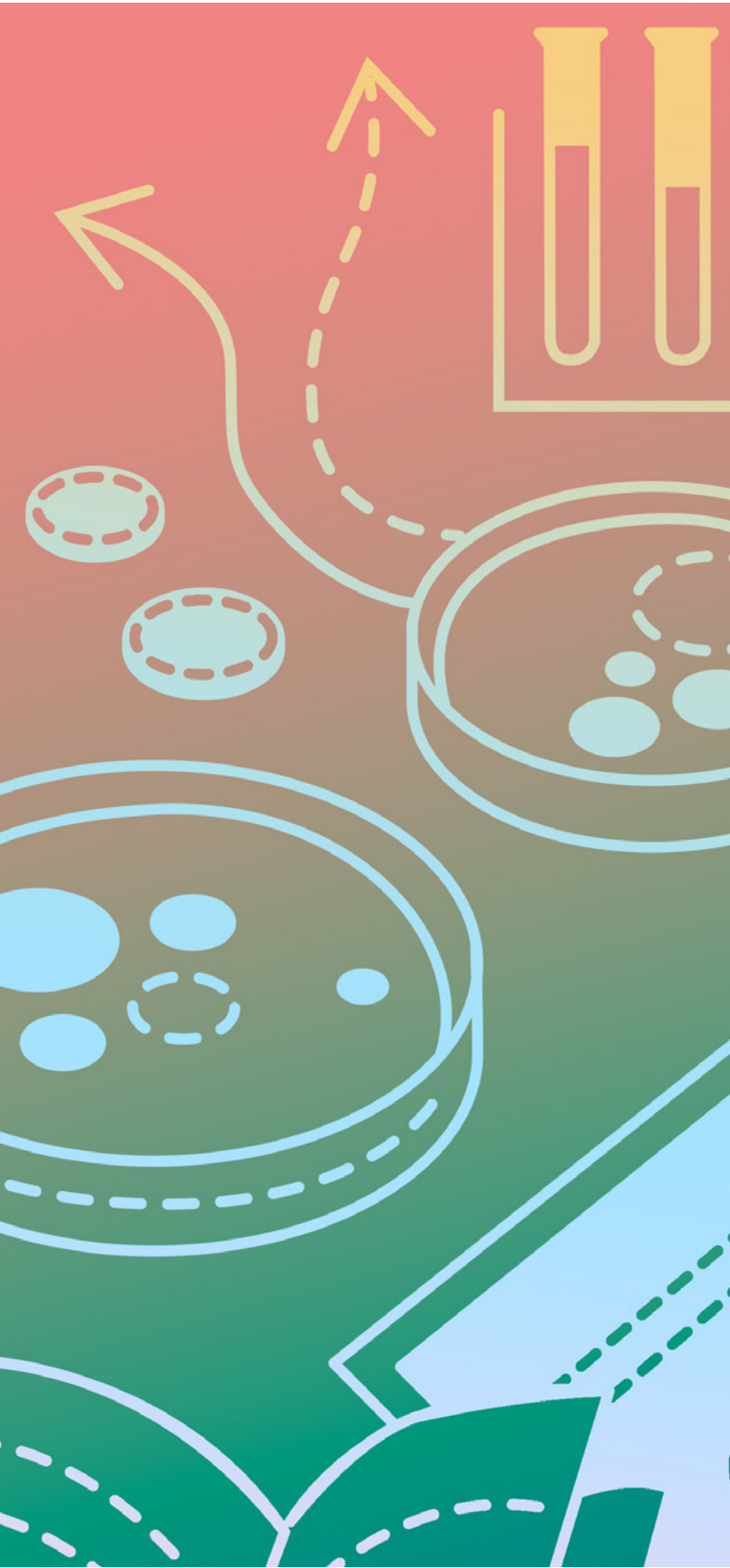
Introduction

Research Professional News has conducted two international surveys this year to examine the challenges and opportunities facing research offices and research services teams, and to consider what the future might hold. The first survey was targeted at people working in research offices and academic research services, while the second was aimed at researchers.

Both surveys received more than 1,100 responses, with an overall total of more than 2,500 people taking part. The insights gleaned follow on from two similar surveys conducted by Research Professional News in 2023, which were the basis for the previous iteration of this report.

This report draws on the two 2025 surveys—and comparisons with the previous surveys—to give a comprehensive overview of how research offices are working to address the challenges facing them and to highlight areas where improvements in support or policy may be needed. The findings of the two 2025 surveys are presented side by side.

This report is aimed at a broad range of stakeholders, including research services staff, researchers, university leadership teams and research funding bodies. We recognise that different institutions structure their research services teams in different ways, and we have used the term 'research offices' throughout to refer to the main support structures for research within institutions.

We hope the 2025 Research Offices of the Future report will contribute to discussions around the world about how to support research office teams and help build the quality of the vital services they provide.

Key findings

- In terms of institutional priorities for the next year, research office staff put the diversification of funding sources top, followed by enhancing research visibility and reputation, then obtaining more funding to increase the amount of research.
- Research office staff see the biggest change drivers as being cost pressures, the use of artificial intelligence programmes and the influence of domestic political policies.
- Research offices are looking closely at how they measure the societal benefits of research, and are keen to consider how best to do this.
- Around a third of research office staff are using AI to find funding opportunities and edit grant applications. However, AI use is also singled out as the biggest threat to research integrity.
- The effects of the US government's approach to research policy are being felt around the world, with respondents in many regions reporting lost research funding and fewer US collaborations.

Breakdown of participants

The 2025 survey of research office and related staff received 1,183 responses—around 350 more than the equivalent survey in 2023. Not all respondents completed all questions. Results have been rounded to the nearest percentage point. The international mix of respondents is shown in Figure 1.

A cross-section of job roles and seniority levels is represented in the sample, which includes research administrators (13 per cent), directors of research services (11 per cent) and those with leadership roles in research development (9 per cent). Other respondents included vice-provosts and pro vice-chancellors for research.

There was a similarly international mix among the 1,406 respondents to the researcher survey, as shown in Figure 2. Again, not all respondents completed all questions. Results are rounded to the nearest percentage point.

Some 40 per cent of researcher respondents identified as tenured professors or faculty staff, with the sample also including senior faculty and department heads (15 per cent), non-tenured researchers (11 per cent) and PhD candidates (8 per cent). Respondents worked across a variety of disciplines, as shown in Figure 3.

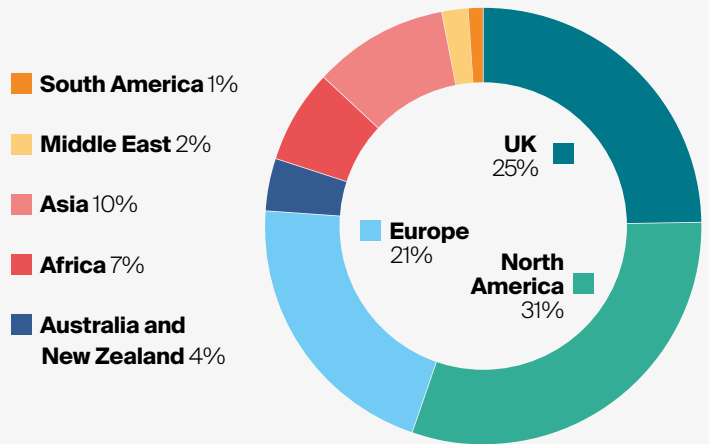**Fig 1** Geographical breakdown of university research office respondents

- **South America** 1%
- **Middle East** 2%
- **Asia** 10%
- **Africa** 7%
- **Australia and New Zealand** 4%

UK 25%
Europe 21%
North America 31%

Fig 2 Geographical breakdown of university researcher respondents

- **South America** 1%
- **Africa** 11%
- **UK** 7%
- **Asia** 12%
- **Middle East** 12%
- **Australia and New Zealand** 7%

Europe 33%
North America 18%
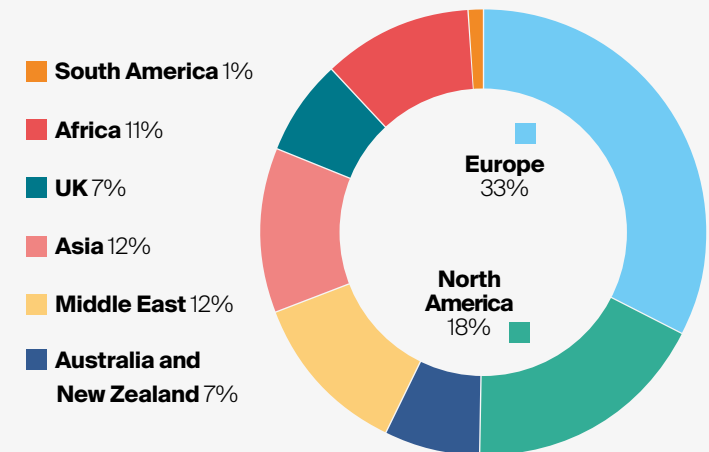
Fig 3 Researcher respondents by discipline in which they predominantly work

13%	20%	39%	29%
Arts and humanities	Economics and social sciences	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics	Other
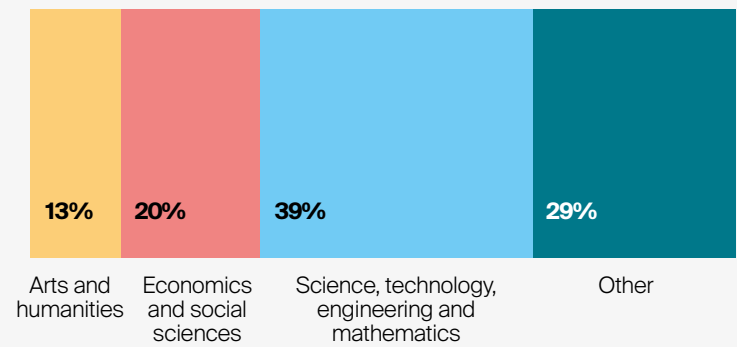
Fig 4 Research office respondents' top priorities for academic research
■ For the next year ■ For the next five years
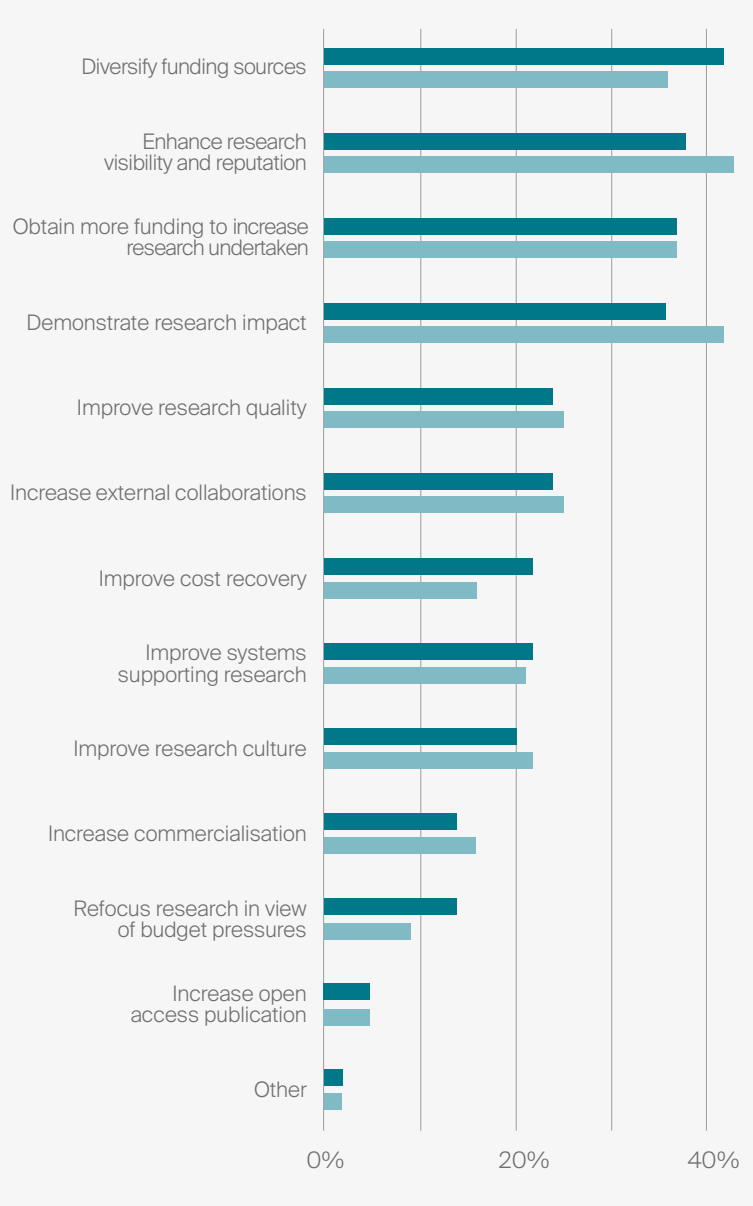
Taking priority

In the previous iteration of this report in 2023, the top three priority areas for the next 12 months identified by research office staff were: obtaining more funding to increase the volume of research (selected by 74 per cent), demonstrating research impact (46 per cent) and improving research quality (44 per cent).

This year, we canvassed opinion on a wider range of topics to gain a more comprehensive view of priority areas.

Asked about their institution's top three academic research priorities for the next 12 months, respondents most frequently cited diversifying funding sources (selected by 42 per cent).

Other high-priority areas cited by research office respondents in 2025 included enhancing research visibility and reputation (38 per cent), obtaining more funding to increase research volume (37 per cent) and demonstrating research impact (36 per cent).

Looking further ahead, we asked respondents to tell us about their institution's main priorities for research over the next five years. Enhancing research visibility and reputation came out on top (selected by 43 per cent), followed by demonstrating impact (42 per cent) and obtaining more funding (37 per cent).
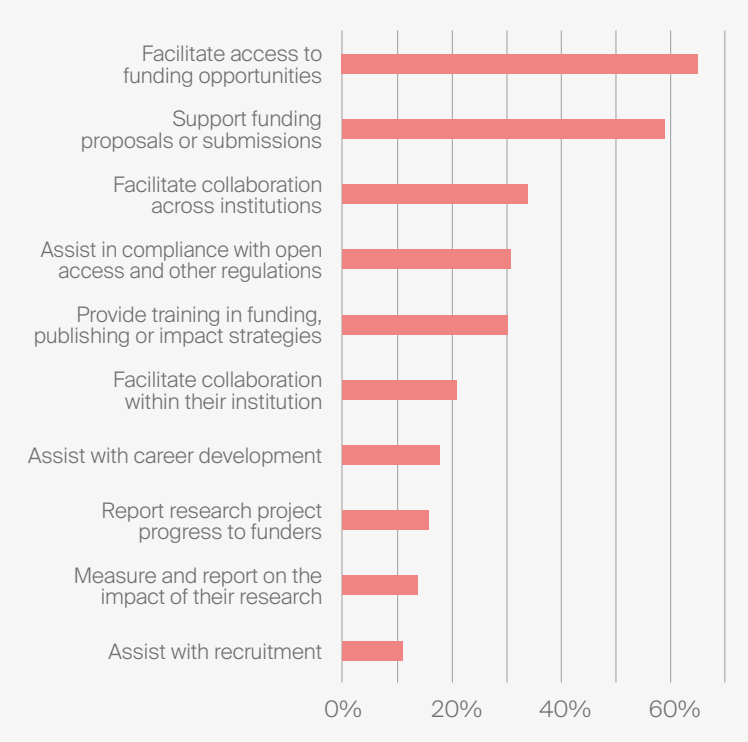
As in 2023, we asked researchers what they expect their research office to be doing to support them. Again, in 2025 we included a broader range of options, meaning results are not directly comparable. However, the top two categories most frequently mentioned by respondents remained the same this year: facilitating access to funding opportunities (selected by 65 per cent) and supporting funding proposals and submissions (59 per cent).

Activities deemed to be less in demand by researchers included assistance with recruitment (selected by 11 per cent), measuring and reporting on research impact (14 per cent) and reporting research project progress to funders (16 per cent).

For this year's report, we also asked researchers to state the activities where they are supported by their research offices.

Those who answered were most likely to cite finding relevant research funding opportunities (selected by 28 per cent), managing article-processing charges (23 per cent) and applying for grants (21 per cent).

"Asked about their institution's academic research priorities for the next 12 months, respondents most frequently cited diversifying funding sources."

Fig 5 Types of support researcher respondents expect from research offices

Fig 6 Activities that researcher respondents say are conducted for them by research offices


Quick takes
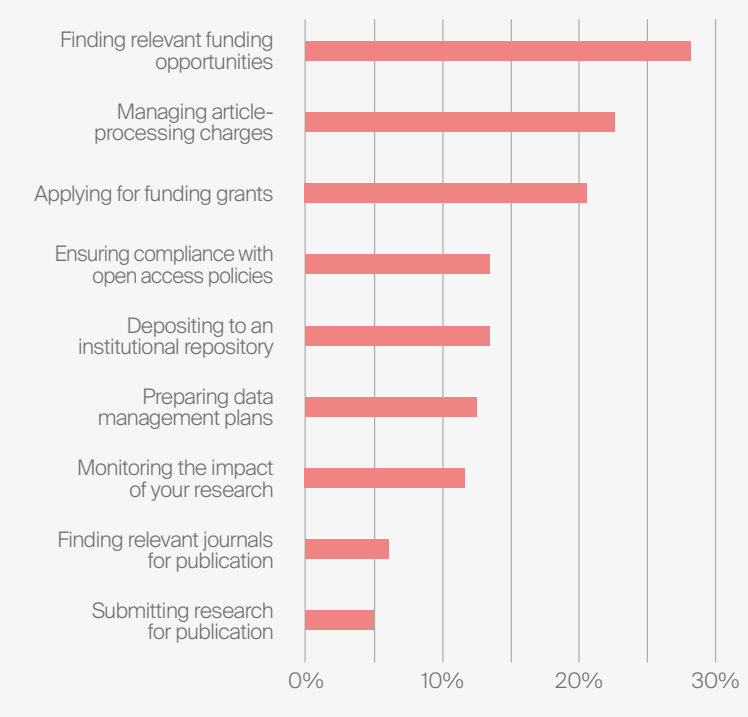
Satisfaction wanes

While overall levels of researcher satisfaction with the activities of their institution's research office have remained fairly consistent, there has been a slight decline between the 2023 and 2025 surveys.

This year—after removing respondents who selected "not applicable"—34 per cent of researchers described themselves as either very satisfied (6 per cent) or satisfied (28 per cent). In 2023, 38 per cent were either satisfied or very satisfied.

Meanwhile, the overall proportion reporting negatively on satisfaction (either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied) is up from 30 per cent two years ago to 37 per cent this year.
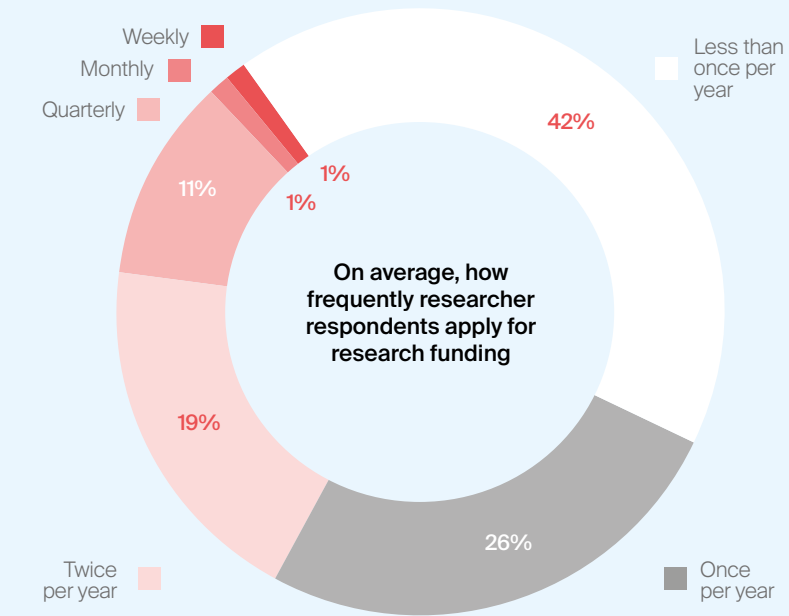
How satisfied are you with the level of support provided by the research office during the entire research life cycle?

■ Very dissatisfied   Very Satisfied ■
■ Dissatisfied   Satisfied ■
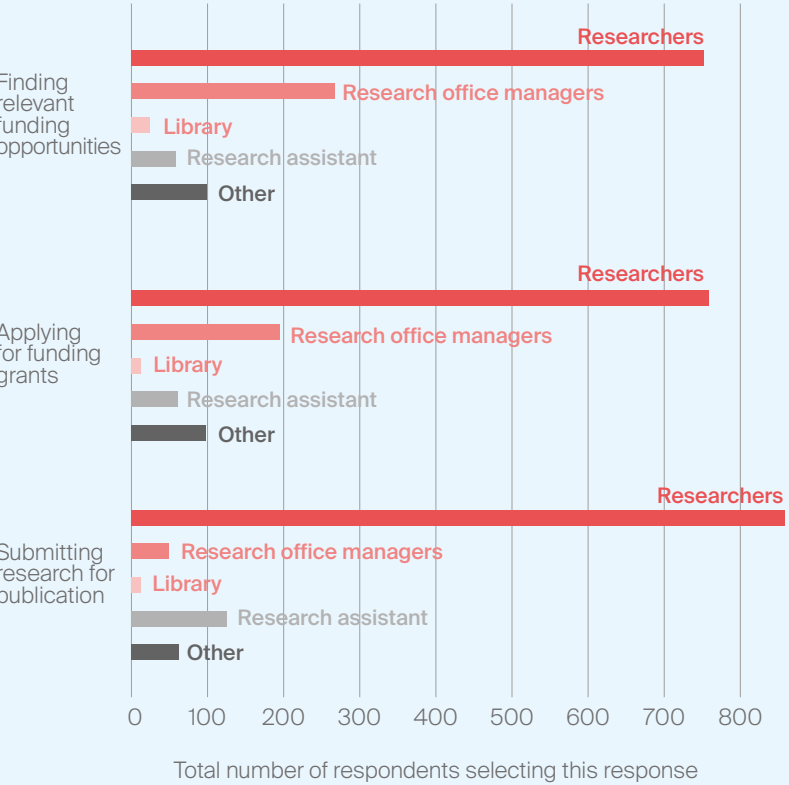□ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

Quick takes
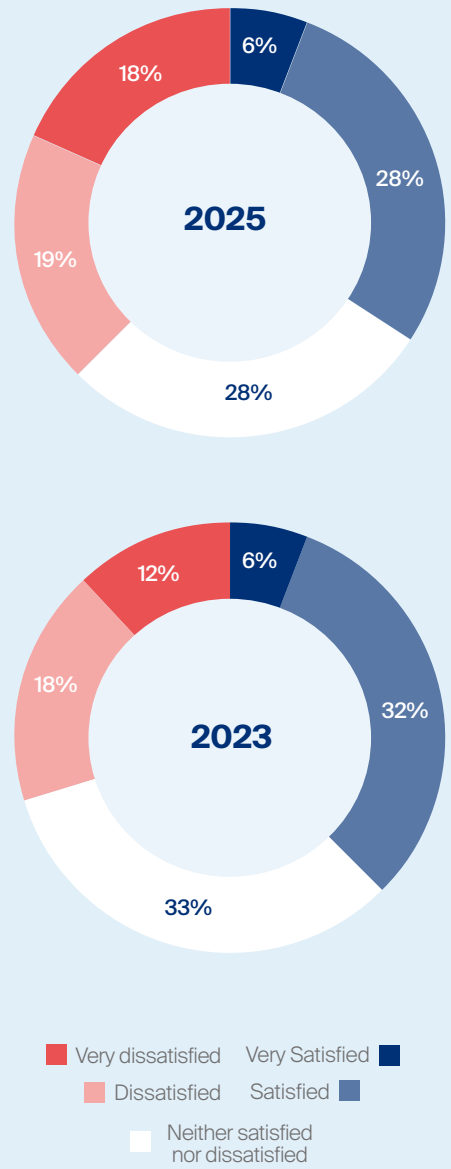
Snapshot of academic life

We asked several survey questions designed to gauge how active academics are in certain areas of research work.

The majority of researcher respondents told us they were only applying for research grants once a year (selected by 26 per cent) or less than once a year (42 per cent). A handful said they were applying monthly or even weekly.

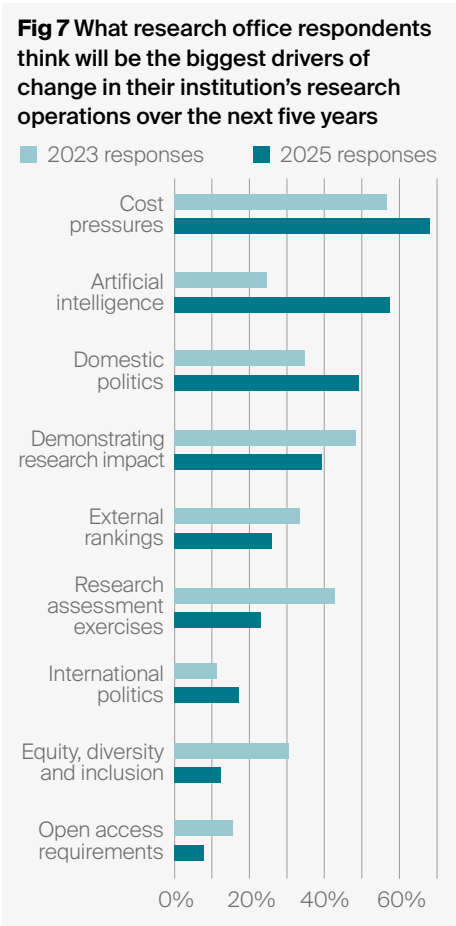We also asked researchers which activities they conduct themselves and for which activities they rely on others.

On average, how frequently researcher respondents apply for research funding

- Weekly 1%
- Monthly 1%
- Quarterly 11%
- Twice per year 19%
- Once per year 26%
- Less than once per year 42%

Who conducts the following activities at researcher respondents' institutions?

Finding relevant funding opportunities
- Researchers
- Research office managers
- Library
- Research assistant
- Other

Applying for funding grants
- Researchers
- Research office managers
- Library
- Research assistant
- Other

Submitting research for publication
- Researchers
- Research office managers
- Library
- Research assistant
- Other

Total number of respondents selecting this response

Driving change

What factors do research office staff think will change how they carry out their work over the next five years? We asked respondents to choose their top three factors in both the 2023 and 2025 surveys—and there have been some interesting changes over that period.

Most striking is the perception of artificial intelligence as a change driver. In 2023, just 25 per cent of respondents selected it in their top three, but in the 2025 survey that jumped to 57 per cent. AI does not take the top spot, however, with cost pressures and resource reductions still seen as the biggest driver of change (selected by 68 per cent of respondents), just as they were in 2023.

Domestic politics, demonstrating impact and external rankings came next in the 2025 ranking, although only the first of these has seen an increase in respondent mentions since 2023.

Among the other factors deemed less likely to drive change than in 2023 are equity, diversity and inclusion.

Fig 7 What research office respondents think will be the biggest drivers of change in their institution's research operations over the next five years

- 2023 responses
- 2025 responses

- Cost pressures
- Artificial intelligence
- Domestic politics
- Demonstrating research impact
- External rankings
- Research assessment exercises
- International politics
- Equity, diversity and inclusion
- Open access requirements

0% 20% 40% 60%

Focus on: Societal impact

One of the most striking findings of the 2023 Research Offices of the Future report was the belief among research office staff that measuring and demonstrating societal impact was of rapidly increasing importance.

Two years ago, respondents were also asked which types of impact they believed would need to be measured most frequently in five years' time. 'Societal benefit' came out on top, ahead of traditional measures such as publications and citation impact. However, respondents also ranked societal benefit as the most difficult form of impact to measure.

Given this clear challenge, the 2025 survey took a deeper dive into the issue of societal impact. First, we asked research office staff why it is important. They gave a range of reasons, with public accountability, funding requirements and strategic differentiation making up the top three overall.

We also wanted to know which outputs research offices believe are of most importance when evaluating the societal impact of research, and we asked survey participants to identify their top three.

Academic publications ranked top overall (selected by 62 per cent), followed by policy documents (42 per cent), patents (39 per cent) and non-academic publications such as magazine articles or blogs (28 per cent).

However, when we asked research office staff and researchers to name the proxy measures that are most important when judging societal impact, there were significant differences between the two groups.

While responses from research office staff produced a top three of media mentions (selected by 42 per cent), citations from policy documents (41 per cent) and recognition awards (36 per cent), researchers went for readership stats (47 per cent), mentions in teaching and learning materials (42 per cent) and citations from research co-authored by non-academics (38 per cent).

To get a longer-term impression of how the measurement of societal impact might develop, we also asked about the top three measures that will become the most important over the next five years.

Both research office staff and researchers said citations in policy documents will be of importance, but there were differences elsewhere. Researchers were far more likely to place views and readership statistics in their top three (with 38 per cent doing so). This measure was selected by just 18 per cent of research office staff.

We also asked research office staff to pick the top three proxies that they find hardest to measure in evaluating societal impact.

Measuring research's relevance to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals ranked top, with 33 per cent placing it in their top three. Citations from policy documents came next (30 per cent), followed by mentions in teaching and learning materials (29 per cent).

Fig 8 Research office respondents' reasons for evaluating the societal impact of research

1. Public accountability
2. Funding requirements
3. Strategic differentiation
4. Shifting evaluation culture
5. Other
6. It isn't important

Fig 9 The most important proxy measures to research office respondents in evaluating the societal impact of research

1. Media mentions
2. Citations from policy documents
3. Recognition awards
4. Citations from research co-authored by non-academics
5. Relevance to UN Sustainable Development Goals

Fig 10 The proxy measures that researcher and research office respondents think will be most important to them in evaluating the societal impact of research in five years' time

	Research office responses	Researcher responses
1	Citations from policy documents	Mentions in teaching/learning materials
2	Media mentions	Citations from policy documents
3	Recognition awards	Views/readership stats
4	Citations from research co-authored by non-academics	Citations from research co-authored by non-academics
5	Citations from patents	Media mentions

Fig 11 The proxies that research office respondents find hardest to measure in evaluating the societal impact of research

1. Relevance to UN Sustainable Development Goals
2. Citations from policy documents
3. Mentions in teaching/learning materials
4. Media mentions
5. Views/readership stats
6. Citations from research co-authored by non-academics
7. Recognition awards
8. Citations from patents
9. Mentions in medical guidelines
10. Mentions in clinical trials

Focus on: Artificial intelligence

We have already seen how the perception of artificial intelligence as transformative to research operations has surged since the last survey, with the proportion of research office staff putting it in their top three change drivers jumping from 25 per cent in 2023 to 57 per cent in 2025.

This is no surprise given the acceleration of large language models, in particular, over the past two years. So what else did our surveys uncover about how research teams are using AI?

Around a third of research office staff say they are already using AI tools for finding funding opportunities (selected by 35 per cent of respondents), for editing or improving grant applications (33 per cent) and for managing data (30 per cent). Almost a quarter (24 per cent) say they use AI to compile information for grant applications.

When asked about how AI could benefit research offices in the next five years, almost half envisaged benefits in finding funding opportunities (48 per cent) and in editing or improving grant applications (47 per cent), management of data (46 per cent) and analysis of unsuccessful grant bids to improve future success (46 per cent).

More than a third of respondents believe AI could in future assist with compiling information for grant applications, internal evaluation of research proposals and compiling profiles of researchers. Just 6 per cent did not recognise any areas where AI would offer benefits.

We also asked researchers how they are using AI. Almost half of respondents (48 per cent) said they already use AI tools for literature searches, with around a third using AI for literature reviews (35 per cent),

manuscript preparation (33 per cent) and data analysis (30 per cent). More than 1 in 10 (13 per cent) have used AI in peer review.

Respondents were asked to give their top two areas where they think AI offers the most benefits to researchers. One in three chose literature searches or data analysis (both 33 per cent).

However, while both academics and research office staff are to some extent embracing AI, their impressions are not wholly positive.

When asked to give a top three of factors they believe pose the biggest threats to research integrity, 60 per cent of research office staff chose AI. The factors next most frequently cited (pressure to publish; cultural issues such as bullying; insufficient training; and insecure employment) were selected by between 30 and 40 per cent of respondents.

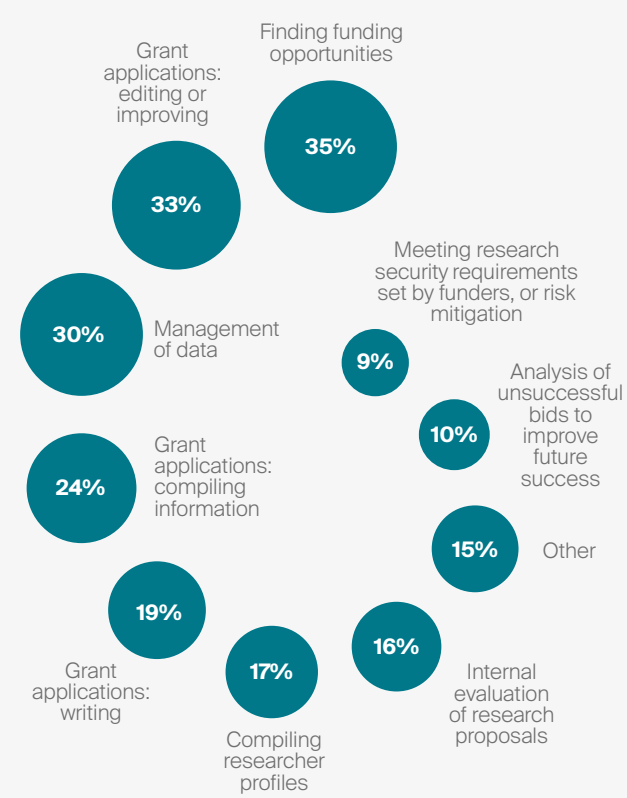**Fig 12** The areas of work in which research office respondents said they use AI

Fig 13 The applications of AI that research office respondents think could bring them the most benefits in the next five years
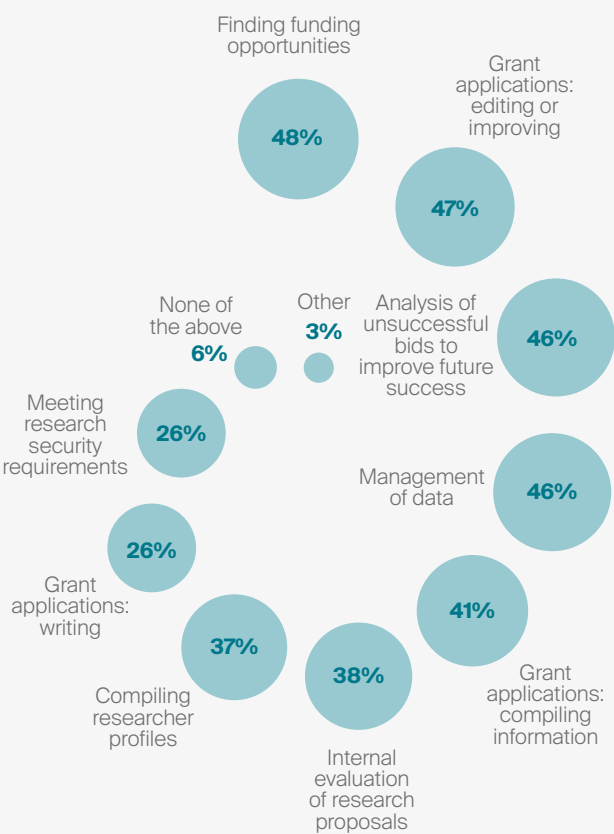

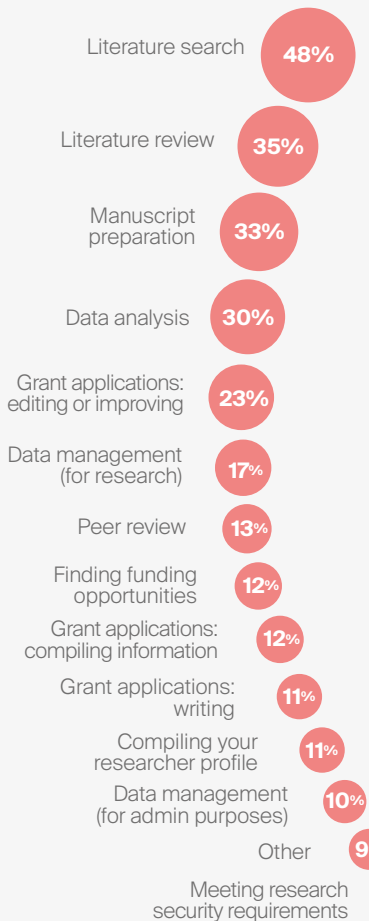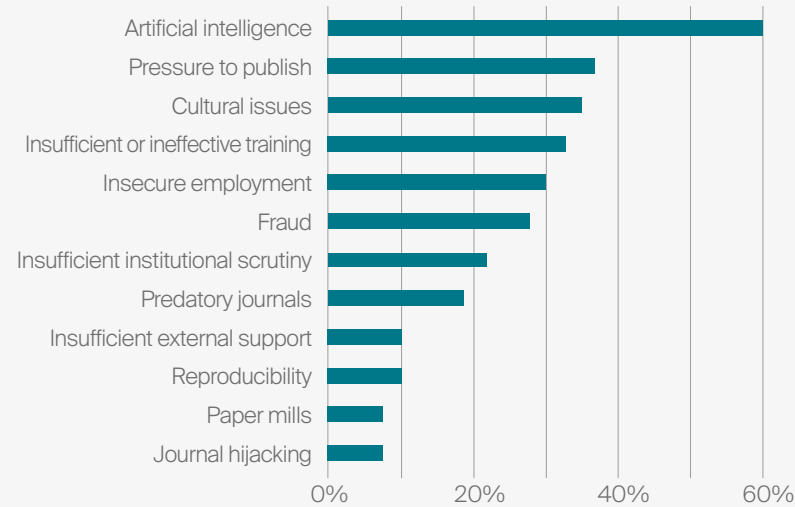**Fig 14** Areas of work in which researcher respondents are using AI

Fig 15 The areas of work where researcher respondents think AI offers the most benefits

Fig 16 What research office respondents think pose the biggest risks to research integrity

"Around a third of research office staff say they are already using AI tools for finding funding opportunities."

US impacts

When the last Research Offices of the Future survey took place two years ago, Joe Biden was US president, having defeated Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election. Now, Trump is back in the White House, initiating a period of turbulence for federally funded research in the US.

We asked research office staff how their institution's research operations have been affected by US government interventions on research funding. Among respondents based outside North America, almost a third (29 per cent) said the actions of the US government had resulted in their institution losing funding. About a quarter (26 per cent) said their institution had lost collaborations with US partners. More than one in 10 (15 per cent) said they were dealing with increased compliance requests as a result of US policies.

Looking only at responses from participants based in North America, the proportion saying their institution had lost funding was much higher (83 per cent), with a far higher proportion (50 per cent) saying compliance requests had increased.
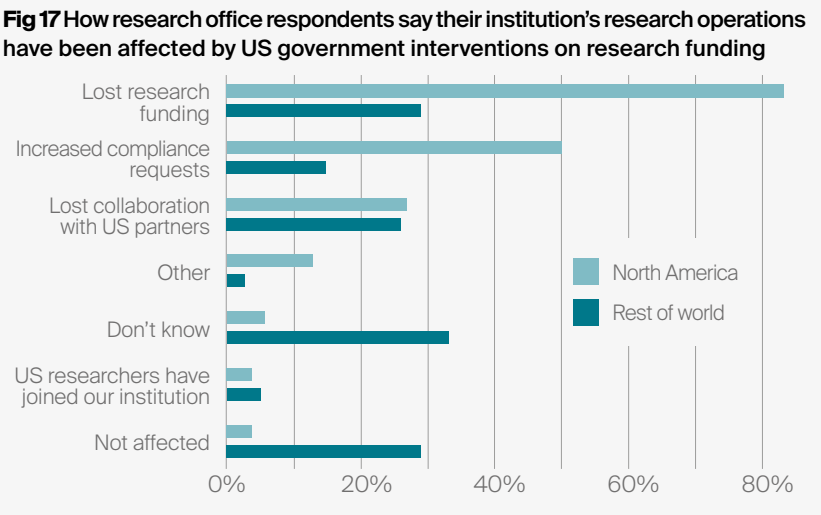
When asked for other examples of impacts from US government interventions, one respondent noted a "loss of funding opportunities relating to equality, diversity and inclusion", while another mentioned new "challenges" with research data access.

International perspectives

To get a sense of whether respondents from different parts of the world view the issues addressed in the survey differently, we filtered some of the key questions for research offices by region. We only compared the regions with the highest number of respondents: continental Europe, the UK and North America.

There are clear similarities in the results, but also some striking differences. For example, research office staff from North America were the only ones who did not list 'demonstrating impact' in their top three priorities over the next five years.

When asked what they think the biggest drivers of change will be over the next five years, respondents across all three regions put the same factors in their overall top three: cost pressures and resource reductions, artificial intelligence and domestic politics. However, none of the three regions had those factors in the same order, and only continental Europe had AI in the top spot.

Fig 17 How research office respondents say their institution's research operations have been affected by US government interventions on research funding

Legend: North America, Rest of world

Fig 18

Institutions' main priorities for academic research over the next five years, according to research office respondents

	North America	UK	Europe
1	Enhance research visibility and reputation	Demonstrate research impact	Enhance research visibility and reputation
2	Diversify funding sources	Obtain more funding to increase research	Obtain more funding to increase research
3	Obtain more funding to increase research	Diversify funding sources	Demonstrate research impact

Biggest drivers of change in their institution's research operations over the next five years, according to research office respondents

	North America	UK	Europe
1	Cost pressures or resource reductions	Cost pressures or resource reductions	Artificial intelligence
2	Domestic politics	Artificial intelligence	Cost pressures or resource reductions
3	Artificial intelligence	Domestic politics	Domestic politics

Main challenges faced by research office respondents

	North America	UK	Europe
1	Budget or resources	Budget or resources	Budget or resources
2	Domestic policy environment	Time pressures	Winning funding grants
3	Attracting or retaining staff	Inadequate systems or software	Time pressures

Biggest risk to research integrity, according to research office respondents

	North America	UK	Europe
1	Artificial intelligence	Artificial intelligence	Artificial intelligence
2	Insufficient or ineffective training	Cultural issues	Pressure to publish
3	Pressure to publish	Pressure to publish	Insecure employment

Up to the challenge

What are the main challenges faced by research offices? According to the majority of respondents to our survey, pressures on budgets and resources rank top.

Some 60 per cent of research office respondents included budget concerns when asked about their top three challenges, with 'winning grants' and 'time pressures' next on the list, both cited by 33 per cent of respondents. More than a quarter also mentioned problems with attracting and retaining staff (28 per cent) and inadequate systems or software (26 per cent).

Researchers, when asked about the biggest challenges they face, were given a different set of response choices, so direct comparisons with research office staff are not possible. However, they too placed budgets and resources at the top of their list of challenges (mentioned by 58 per cent), followed by winning grants (46 per cent) and finding funding opportunities (35 per cent).
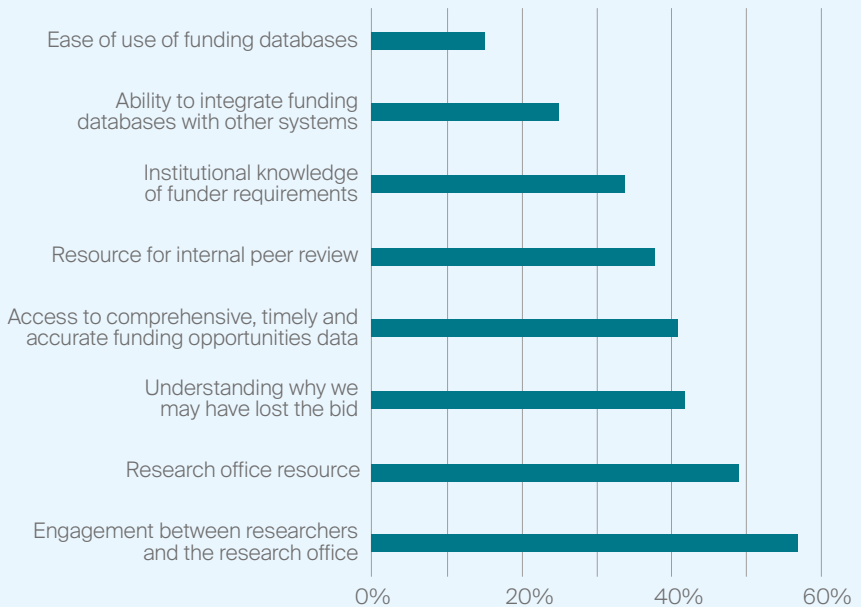
We also asked research office staff about the biggest challenges their institution faces in winning research funding. Engagement between researchers and the research office was the most frequently cited problem, selected by 57 per cent of respondents.

Research office resources (49 per cent) and understanding why their institution lost out in a research bid (42 per cent) were the next two biggest challenges in winning research funding reported in the 2025 survey.

"Sixty per cent of research office respondents included budget concerns in their top three challenges."

Top challenges faced by researchers and research offices

- ● Research office responses
- ● Researcher responses

Challenge	Research office	Researcher
Budget or resources	60%	58%
Winning grants	33%	46%
Time pressures	33%	29%
Attracting or retaining staff	28%	15%
Inadequate systems or software	26%	7%
Domestic policy environment	25%	15%
Finding funding opportunities	24%	35%
Support from institutional leadership	19%	17%
Demonstrating research impact	15%	12%
International policy environment	5%	4%
Connecting with researchers	16%	
Visibility of data across research activities	15%	
Finding research partners or collaborators	19%	
Research culture	17%	
Staff pay relative to workload	13%	
Support from research office or research management teams	10%	
Other	4%	

Biggest challenges institutions face in winning research funding, according to research office respondents

- Ease of use of funding databases
- Ability to integrate funding databases with other systems
- Institutional knowledge of funder requirements
- Resource for internal peer review
- Access to comprehensive, timely and accurate funding opportunities data
- Understanding why we may have lost the bid
- Research office resource
- Engagement between researchers and the research office

What our research office respondents said

We gave respondents to our research offices survey the opportunity to tell us about the main issues affecting their work. Here are some of the things they told us.

> We need to reframe the role of the research office not just as a compliance or facilitation unit but as a strategic enabler of institutional impact. This requires not only operational efficiency but also creative policy foresight, data-informed leadership, and proactive engagement with stakeholders inside and outside academia.

> AI doesn't have to be a negative, but too many people are using it as a replacement for critical thinking skills. As long as humans are still evaluating the current outputs with a critical and expert eye, we should be OK.

> The main issue with my institution seems to be lack of guidance and a coherent research strategy for the entire institution.

> The ability of higher education institutions to conduct research is at high risk. The amount of financial, cultural and political pressure that institutions are facing is causing them to reprioritise how they operate and the types of activities they should prioritise.

> Societal impact must be institutionally embedded, not treated as an afterthought. It should influence how projects are scoped from the start, how incentives are structured and how we define excellence in research performance. This also calls for better integration between research, engagement and teaching missions.

> The institution where I worked for over five years, despite experiencing research funding success, decided to deprioritise research and ended its research office operations. Needless to say, these are unusual times, which are reshaping the role of universities, who they serve and how they function.

> Responsible AI use will encourage researchers and quality output, but the need for training in this area is urgent.

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Conclusion

This report has aimed to provide a snapshot of the issues affecting research offices and their staff—along with researchers—and to consider their views on what the research offices of the future might look like.

The report's findings suggest research offices are facing a number of key challenges, including:

- A perceived need to diversify sources of funding.
- Capitalising on the potential benefits of AI for research operations while protecting research integrity.
- Impacts from the US government's major changes to research funding and policy.
- Questions over how best to capture and monitor the societal impact of research.

In terms of researchers' attitudes, the report highlights how academics look to their institutions' research offices to help them access funding opportunities, to support their funding proposals and submissions, and to facilitate collaboration across institutions.

Amid the challenges, this report highlights the vital role research offices play in supporting researchers.

Research Professional News Intelligence   **November 2025**