

Editorial

Journal ISSN number: 2054-5770

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03-15-2022 Cite as 10.15180/221701 Editorial

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Published in [Spring 2022, Issue 17](#)

Article DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15180/221701>

Keywords

Editorial, research policy, research culture

Issue 17

Earlier this year, the politician George Freeman admitted that the complexity of international cultures of scientific research left him 'humbled and very aware of how very little I knew'. Freeman, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science, Research and Innovation, was giving evidence to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee. His acknowledgement that serious problems emerge when research incentives become too narrow, and researchers are pressurised to produce work in short timescales tightly framed by immediate organisational, bureaucratic or political imperatives, was one of the many interesting issues addressed during the sessions.

From the sessions it became evident that policy makers are becoming much more aware that 'practical research' paradoxically often develops out of abstract and sometimes wildly esoteric ideas. These are big issues, and they help intellectually underpin the range of this edition, which stretches from Bletchley Park to spirit photography via the BepiColombo mission to Mercury, practices of embedding sound in exhibitions, and the 1875 jubilee celebrations of the Stockton and Darlington Railway.

This felt important, because while it's become commonplace to highlight, for example, emerging biotechnologies, the environmental sciences and digital technologies in shaping the emerging future, interrogating the systems, priorities and general orientation of the research environment that shapes the use and understanding of that knowledge is far less common.

Indeed, from specific goals like developing the UK's space sector, to broader objectives such as fostering regional research networks, many of the subjects brought up by the Committee had direct and obvious salience to both the content and purpose of the *Science Museum Group Journal*.

But of even greater significance was the Committee's probing of the strengths and weaknesses of the UK's wider research environment. Building a self-critical research culture has become a pressing national task. But this is not just because it's a precondition of meaningful innovation. It is also fundamental to social wellbeing and democratic self-confidence. Playing with new ideas, sharing methodological experiments and reflecting on past practices are all things that we can, should and arguably *must* do much more of.

Not only is humility important, it's also important to recognise that curiosity is an essential end in itself. Indeed, perhaps the most important role this journal plays is to provide an open access forum for heterodox research.

Component DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15180/221701/001>

Tags

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