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Working the metricized academy: diary completion exercise, pilot project - covering letter.

Dear Colleague,

I am writing to invite you to take part in a pilot research project to record in a written, audio or video diary your experiences of 'Raising the Bar' (RTB). Your participation can involve a very small commitment of time on your part, but even that would be extremely valuable in helping a group of Newcastle academics subject RTB to critical scrutiny. This pilot research is intended both to inform a future larger-scale collaborative research project, and also to contribute to debate within the university about how to create a supportive environment to foster research.

It is envisaged that this pilot will form the beginning of a much larger, inter-faculty, qualitative and quantitative research project designed to study RTB as an example of outcomes-based performance management in the higher education sector. The eventual research project would seek to answer two major questions about RTB: how did it come about, and what did it do? For further information about the background and aims of this research, see the draft research plan available from the project website, www.rtbresearch.org

This pilot project is intended to allow Newcastle academics to take stock of the period following the release of RTB's 'Research and Innovation Performance Expectations' ('RIPE') documents in the summer of 2015 until the end of December 2016. Within this period of roll-out and debate, it is likely that the actual effects on the key target metrics will be limited and thus not measurable. However, the emotional, cognitive and affective impacts of the RTB announcement and roll-out process may be more significant. Likewise practices of working at Newcastle University, and what academics think about the purpose and nature of academic labour, may already begin to change. This project is designed to give an indication of these effects, to inform both a future research plan and ongoing debates about university governance and how to best support research. See footnote 1 for more on the purpose and scope of this exercise.

Newcastle University includes some leading scholars in this field. In turn, the steering group has created an advisory board which includes some of the UK's and the world's leading scholars in the field. This research is rooted in cutting-edge literatures and is

designed to make a contribution to international debates. Research has been designed in conversation with university research/senior management.

Security of participants and other ethical questions are important – please see footnote 2. This project has been given HaSS faculty ethical approval.

The diary form, as well as all other relevant documents, can be downloaded from the project website. **Please email me to let me know** if you are completing a diary: this is important so we can keep you updated, and also to have a sense of the numbers of people participating in the pilot project. An off-campus, non-university email address (rtb.research@outlook.com) has been created to ensure security (see footnote 2).

Instead of keeping a diary, you could make audio/video recordings on a mobile device and send them to me for collation and eventual transcription. You could also send your reflections by email, and I would collate them in the same way.

Many thanks for supporting this exciting, inter-disciplinary, collaborative research.

Yours Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicholas Megoran', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr Nick Megoran,
Reader in Political Geography.

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Footnote 1: Purpose and use

At this stage, this diary completion exercise is a pilot project. We would like scholars from across the university to begin by completing a retrospective diary (if you have time), and then, over the coming months, add new entries from time to time. These entries could range from frequent, extensive paragraphs of reflective prose to infrequent, informal jottings. Even if you only able to commit a tiny amount of time to this, your participation would still be valuable.

Our intention with this pilot project is to build towards a ‘sand-pit’ event in the autumn term of 2016, when researchers from across the university come together to formulate a larger research project. In advance of that you will be invited (without obligation) to share your experiences with the research team. We also hope that it will be a useful and helpful exercise for you to reflect on your own experiences of working at Newcastle University at this time.

We are in conversation with academics outside Newcastle and a theatre company about producing a stage play which enacts the qualitative findings about academic experiences of RTB. Data from the pilot project may be used as the basis of this. It will be performed for university and civic audiences, and performances will be used to facilitate discussions within and without the university on the changing nature of Newcastle University and how its experiences relate to those of people in other employment sectors in the city.

Footnote 2: SECURITY and ETHICS

To ensure your security and anonymity, information about who is taking part in the pilot project will be held, password protected, on an off-campus private computer and not accessed on the campus or accessible from it. The identities of anyone taking part will only be known to Nick Megoran. Correspondence with participants will be conducted via non-university project email (rtb.research@outlook.com) to an email address (work or personal) designated by the participant.

Anonymization of people mentioned in your diary is important. It must not be possible to identify individuals (including yourself) in publications or outputs such as stage plays, and standard procedures to anonymize people by concealing the faculties, schools and roles they have will be followed. As you complete this diary you may find it easier to record real names, meetings and places. However, before sharing, please anonymise names – guidance will be given on this when requested. You will be provided with further instructions on this when being asked to share your findings.

You are welcome to withdraw from this research at any time. If you would like to do that, please contact Nick Megoran and you will be removed from the database and no request will be made to share your reflections. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact Dr Nick Megoran, Reader in Political Geography, at either rtb.research@outlook.com or by internal telephone on 86450.