

do different

The termly newsletter of Eastern Arc

Summer 2022

THE COLLABORATIVE COAST

Our 2022 Conference opens
for registration

ALSO IN THIS EDITION

EARC research excellence recognised by REF

Two new EARC champions appointed

EARC joins UK Reproducibility Network

Levelling up: we respond to the proposals

Findings from EARC workshops on coastal
health data

A note from the Director

Since we published our spring edition of *Do Different* earlier this year, the political landscape -- as well as the world of research -- have changed significantly. Shortly after the Government's proposals for levelling up were published, the PM Boris Johnson stepped down. Will the latter derail the former, or will the new PM continue with the Government's proposals? Assuming they will, we look at how they might affect our region on p7.

Elsewhere, the long-awaited results of the audit of research excellence in the UK, the Research Excellence Framework (REF) were published. On p3 we take a look at how the three EARC universities of UEA, Essex and Kent, performed.

Looking ahead, our annual Conference is on the horizon, and we preview the programme on p4-5. With a focus on 'the collaborative coast', it will be a chance for researchers and stakeholders to come together to explore the issues facing both the people, the economy, the environment and the geography of our region. Registration is open now, so do join us if you can; it's sure to be a fascinating event.



EARC joins the UK Reproducibility Network



In our last edition (Spring 2022) we highlighted our recently-published [position paper](#) that set out the background and context for the reproducibility crisis, and suggested a number of steps that could and should be taken to address it.

Following this, we were invited to become '[affiliate stakeholders](#)' in the [UK Reproducibility Network](#), joining bodies such as PLOS, Science, Research Libraries UK, the Royal Society of Chemistry and others.

We will continue to feed into its work, and will work across the consortium to raise awareness of the issue and encourage engagement with it. As part of this, we are planning to develop a reproducibility network that will help to share good practice and dissemination information on developments in the field.

If you want to be part of this network, email us at info@easternarc.ac.uk.

Funder webinar recordings and podcasts

In the spring we hosted a number of funder visits, which are now available as either podcasts or recordings.

- **National Institutes for Health Research:** In March colleagues from the Research Design Service gave a clear, straightforward overview of how the billion-pound funder is structured, and how you can frame your application for the best chance of success, and where you can find out more. A podcast of the event is available [here](#).
- **Wellcome Trust humanities and social sciences:** Dr Tom Bray, a Senior Research Manager in the Discovery Research team at Wellcome, explained Wellcome's provision for HSS [here](#)
- **The Defence and Security Accelerator.** DASA works across government to find and fund exploitable innovation to support the UK's defence and security. Find out more [here](#).

EARC research excellence recognised by REF

The three Eastern Arc universities of UEA, Essex and Kent are in the top 25% nationally for research power, and over 85% of their publications are either world-leading or internationally excellent.

Collectively, over 2,000 academics and researchers submitted their work to the latest Research Excellence Framework (REF), a national exercise to assess the quality of research taking place in the UK.

The quality of the research being undertaken by the universities was clear in a wide number of subjects. Between them, the universities submitted evidence in 33 subject areas (or 'units of assessment' (UoAs)), over 95% of all possible areas, demonstrating the breadth of the work going on across the consortium.

Together, the universities were top five nationally in a third of these (30%), and top ten in 40% of them, outperforming many of the Russell Group universities, according to an analysis by the Times Higher Education (THE). Areas of research excellence included History, Development Studies, Law, Modern Languages and Linguistics, Economics, Sociology, Philosophy and Area Studies.

THE also calculated the 'research power' of each university by factoring in the number of people being submitted in each area. According to this algorithm, the three EARC universities were in the top quartile of the 157 institutions taking part, and were in the top 10 nationally in more than a quarter of the UoAs.

Importantly, the EARC universities scored well for impact; that is, the effect that its research has had outside of academia. This has always been central to the work of the three universities, which have recognised the importance of 'research with purpose' since their foundation in the early 1960s. All were in the top 40 nationally, and in many of its subject areas their case studies were deemed to be 100% world-leading.

'These results have demonstrated the excellence of the work being undertaken across our consortium,' said Phil Ward, Director of Eastern Arc. 'It is a recognition of the important research that is being conducted at all three universities; research with social, economic and environmental impact.'

'However, beyond the headlines it is important to never lose sight of the individual academics, researchers, managers and others whose very specific and tireless work underlies these results. I would like to congratulate them all on behalf of the consortium, and thank them for all they have done to make this possible.'



Eastern Arc Conference 2022: The Collaborative Coast



The coast defines our region. Stretching from the Wash in the north to the Channel in the south, it offers huge opportunities – but also significant challenges.

Our conference this year will take place on 22 September at Wivenhoe House Hotel at the University of Essex. It will be a chance for academics and regional stakeholders to come together to discuss key questions facing the coast, from addressing health inequalities to preparing for climate change, from harnessing renewable energy to supporting our creative community.

Together, we will identify the issues, make connections and start to develop solutions.

The Conference comprises a plenary session at the beginning and end of the day. The first plenary, delivered by Prof Jules Pretty, will explore **a new vision for our coast**. The final one, chaired by Prof Chiara di Cesare, will discuss the '**coastal health deficit**', and how to address the issues raised by Chris Whitty in his annual report.

Between these two bookends are eight 'breakout' sessions, focussed on each of the EARC thematic priorities; see the call out box, below.

More details on all of these, and a link for registration, can be found on our dedicated webpage: <https://easternarc.ac.uk/conference2022/>

Art as a driver in place-making and levelling up (1): Stimulating engagement
Localising human rights
Place-based approaches to health and wellbeing
Sustainable coastal ecosystems and opportunities for regional development
Art as a driver in place-making and levelling up (2): a practitioners' roundtable
The revival of the seaside resort? Hosts, guests, communities and opportunities
Kent and Medway listens: Improving mental health and wellbeing
Winds of change: Governing offshore wind developments in the East of England

Two new champions join EARC

Following the end of Brian Reid's term as Associate Dean for Innovation at UEA, he stepped down from his role as EARC champion for the Sustainability, Natural Resources and Food theme.

Two colleagues were appointed in his place.

- **Dr Christa Brunnschweiler** is an Associate Professor of Economics. Her research interests include economic growth and development, particularly in resource economics and conflict studies. She has recently been studying how we can change attitudes and behaviour for better natural resource management using behavioural economics.
- **Dr Avidan Kent** is an Associate Professor in International Law. Avidan is the Founder and Convenor of UEA's International Law Research Group, and is interested in areas including international environment law, public participation and climate-induced migration.



'It is wonderful that Christa and Avidan will be joining us, and I know that they will be very strong advocates for the collaboration,' said Phil Ward, the Director of EARC. 'Their research has demonstrated their creativity and innovation in working with diverse stakeholders including colleagues in government, NGOs, and the third sector, as well as other academics and researchers. I look forward to working closely with them to develop new avenues, new links and new initiatives that will benefit those at all three universities.'

Christa and Avidan will be joining Prof Graham Underwood (Essex) and Prof Karen Jones (Kent).

EARC responds to the Nurse Review

Eastern Arc submitted a response to the review undertaken by Prof Sir Paul Nurse, the Director of the Crick Institute.

The review was intended to safeguard what the Government sees as 'the manifest strengths of the RDI system across the UK and nurture its diversity, ranging from the pipeline of pioneering, visionary blue-skies

research through to practical support for innovators to commercialise their ideas.'

The response made the point that, although there was some merit in 'concentrating' research in very large, metropolitan universities, there was a significant danger in doing so. There is strength in diversity, and value through effective networks of excellence. As the last two Research Excellence Frameworks have emphasised (see p3), there was a need to ensure 'that excellent research continues to be well-supported wherever it is found.'

Given the size and location of the EARC universities, the necessary creativity and flexibility that are fundamental to interdisciplinary research are more easily achieved. It enables more cross-fertilisation across disciplines as departments and the campus as a whole tend to be smaller, but it also enables the universities to be essential anchors, facilitators and connectors within the region.

To read the full response, click on the link, [here](#).

The Levelling Up White Paper: Where does EARC stand?

In February the Government published its long-awaited proposals for 'levelling up' the UK. There was much to like in them: the mission-centred approach will help focus efforts on key areas of need.

We particularly welcomed the Government's aim to devolve decision-making and empower communities, and we look forward to working with councils, local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) and other stakeholders to tackle the challenges we face within our economy and society.

The need for long-term thinking and political consensus

However, there are two key issues that we believed the Government needed to address to ensure that the delivery of its ambition was effective and translated into improvements in the lives of individuals and communities.

For levelling up to work, it needs to be sustainable in the long-term and based upon consensus. The Paper itself notes that 'spatial policy in the UK has...been characterised by endemic policy churn' and that 'success is measured in decades not years.'

The political response to the publication of the White Paper has demonstrated that no such consensus was secured in preparing this framework. In addition, we don't believe that the short to medium-term goals outlined in the Paper will be enough to embed real, sustainable structural change.

Regional difference and R&D investment

More specifically, we have concerns about how regional disparities were identified. As the White Paper points out, 'patterns of economic and social performance across different parts of the UK are rich, complex and highly granular,' and 'differences within UK regions or cities are larger than differences between regions.'

This is true for economic and social investment, and it is equally true when it comes to R&D funding. The White Paper sets out the Government's target to increase R&D spend outside the 'Greater South East' by 40% by 2030. Although not defined, we take the Greater South East to mean the East and South East of England. This is too broad a region to be meaningful.

Current R&D expenditure is, in global figures, highest in London, the South East and East of England, but it is heavily distorted by the location of the six 'Golden Triangle' universities within these regions, which are all within the top ten richest universities in the UK.

The Eastern Arc universities lie within the shadow of the Golden Triangle, as do many of the former 1994 Group universities. In the white paper, as in the R&D Roadmap, there is no recognition of the difference of scale between the two. There is a need – as the White Paper implies – to analyse and understand regional need and opportunity at a granular level and be careful in differentiating such significant variations within regions.

In summary

Although we welcomed the Levelling Up White Paper, and believe that it offers a strong basis on which to build change, there are significant concerns, and in responding to the publication of the White Paper we called on the Government to work across party lines, to reach out to and fully engage with regional stakeholders and communities, and to understand the specific needs and strengths at a sub-regional level. By doing so we hoped to ensure its sustainability and break the cycle of 'stop-start' policy and 'patchwork' investment that, as the White Paper succinctly puts it, 'first builds hope, then destroys it.'

Annual Report 2020-21 published

In 2019 Eastern Arc launched its second phase.

We undertook a wide-ranging consultation that resulted in a new strategy for 2020-25, the parameters of which we set out in last year's Annual Report.

In 2020-21 we began implementing this strategy. We did so at a challenging time, as the Covid pandemic disrupted the economy and society and changing the way we worked and lived.

Eastern Arc has supported our members in meeting this challenge. From providing funding for research on a Covid vaccine, to analysing the effect of the pandemic on our staff and students and developing new platforms and avenues for supporting collaborations, 2020-21 has shown how the consortium can flex and adapt, responding to the specific and changing needs while continuing to focus on our longer term collaborative aims.

In our Annual Report, published in March, we set out how we have done so, highlighting key achievements of the past year and how these have taken forward our three objectives: to develop collaborations, to support risk-taking and experimental activities, and to engage and advocate externally.

To read the Report in full, go to our dedicated page or contact info@easternarc.ac.uk if you want a print copy.



EARC Archives and Special Collections: opportunity for CHASE student

In our last edition we highlighted the new strategy for our archives and special collections. Entitled 'Empowering the East', it aimed to encourage archivists and curators to be strong leaders and full collaborators in developing and undertaking research projects.

As part of this empowerment, the Archives and Special Collections Group advertised for a PhD student from the [CHASE doctoral training partnership](#), to work with it in identifying commonalities and complementarities between them. It was an opportunity for a student with an interest in a career in curation to develop the skills and experience that would put them in a good position after they completed their doctorate.

The response from CHASE students was good, and the Group is currently identifying the best applicant to appoint. To find out more, contact info@easternarc.ac.uk.

Coastal health data

What are the issues, and what can be done?

In 2021 the Chief Medical Officer [looked at health in coastal communities](#), and suggested that the available data on health and wellbeing were poor. He recommended that this should be addressed.

Eastern Arc took the first steps towards this by hosting two workshops on 19 and 21 July 2022. The first was virtual, the second in-person, and over 50 participants took part, including academics, researchers, data analysts and data owners. They represented over 25 organisations, including universities, NHS trusts, local authorities, charities and third sector organisations.

A significant range of issues were identified through this process. These included difficulties with risk-averse data owners, a lack of connection and discussion between those involved in managing and using data, trust, granularity and cost.

A brief summary of the findings will be published in the autumn, and this will act as a starting point for further workshops that will develop specific and concrete interventions for overcoming the issues identified. If you want to find out more, contact info@easternarc.ac.uk.



With radical hearts and open minds

Eastern Arc is the regional research consortium that brings together the universities of East Anglia, Essex and Kent.

All three universities were established in the 1960s to be a different type of institution, aiming to work across disciplinary boundaries, and to offer alternative ways of thinking.

Eastern Arc continues this tradition. If you want to find out more about our work, go to our website where you can discover what we've achieved so far and how you can get involved.

<https://easternarc.ac.uk/getting-involved/>