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**Abstract**

What is the central research activity in modern universities? This paper uses a comprehensive survey among individuals from 15 countries to map differences in orientation towards basic/fundamental research, applied/practical research and a combination of the two. Despite some claims in the literature that basic research is no longer a preoccupation of universities, our findings point at a continued strong presence of basic research in universities but with large variations between countries and academic disciplines. At the individual level, most academics engage in a combination of basic and applied research, rather than specialising, with applied orientations generally more common. Academics specialising in basic research tend to receive less external funding, work in environments where applied research is less emphasised and hold weaker professional obligations to apply their knowledge to problems in society. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Bentley, Peter James, E-Mail: pbentley@unimelb.edu.au