

RESEARCH INVESTED SCHOOLS CONFERENCE

Climbing Your Next RIS 'Mountain'

A participant briefing - what to expect, how to prepare, and why it matters

This document is your preparation guide for RIS Conference Day 1. It introduces three interlocking ideas - the Mountaineering Metaphor, the SAID Principle, and the P:EAKS Capability Framework - that will run through everything on the day: the opening keynote, the three capability workstreams, and the closing debrief.

Reading this before you complete the pre-conference survey will take about 10 minutes. It will help you answer the survey honestly and specifically - and it will mean you arrive on the day already oriented rather than starting cold.

The day is designed around one central idea:





"Your research practice capabilities will only grow to the level of demands you seek and the level of performance you are prepared to give to achieve them."

So, are the demands on you clear? Are you prepared to 'pay the price' to climb?

1. The Mountaineering Metaphor - Locating Your Current Altitude

Different schools are at different stages of building research capabilities and a research culture. Rather than describing these as 'levels' or 'stages' - language that implies a linear ladder - we use four mountains. Each mountain represents a different level of demand: the complexity, scale, and ambition of what your research leadership is being asked to do and why.

The mountains are not achievement badges. They are demand descriptors. A school operating at Kilimanjaro demand isn't 'behind' a school at Aconcagua - it is operating under a different set of conditions, and needs a different preparation profile to achieve the current challenge – to adapt before seeking to climb higher.

Mountain	Demand Level	What It Looks Like	Archetype
 Kosciuszko	Early-stage research culture	Building foundations - first formal research structures, initial staff engagement	<i>Explorer / early Builder</i>
 Kilimanjaro	Structured research engagement	Research is a planned activity; some staff involved; emerging evidence of impact	<i>Builder</i>
 Aconcagua	Whole-school evidence practice	Research informs decisions across the school; shared language; visible in strategy	<i>Pathfinder</i>
 Everest	System-level research leadership	Leading research culture across schools or networks; enabling others to climb	<i>Guide</i>

One of the first things the Pre-conference Survey will ask you to do is locate your school honestly on this map - not where you aspire to be, but where you are right now. The more honest your response, the better setup the Day 1 opening session and the more useful the day becomes.

A note on archetypes: Explorer, Builder, Pathfinder, and Guide describe your current leadership position relative to your mountain - not your seniority or experience. An experienced teacher new to school research leadership may be an Explorer. A Deputy Principal three years into building a research culture may be a Builder or Pathfinder. The archetype is about your readiness and orientation, not your CV.

2. The SAID Principle - Why 'Demand' Is the Essential Starting Point

SAID stands for Specific Adaptation to Imposed Demands. It is a principle from genetics and exercise science, but it applies directly to organisational development:

Organisms - and organisations - adapt specifically to the demands placed upon them.

Low demand produces limited adaptation. Increased demand requires new capabilities.

In practice, this means:

- If you don't know where you're going, any path will take you there. So, a school that asks little of its research objective or culture will develop limited research capability - regardless of good intentions.
- A school that raises the demand - more ambitious goals, wider staff involvement, system-level influence - must develop new capabilities to meet it.
- The gap between your current capability and the demand of your next mountain is not a failure. It is your development agenda.

This is why the day's workstreams are not generic skill-building sessions. They are capability responses to specific demand increases. The question each workstream asks is: "Given that you are trying to climb a bigger mountain - what does this capability need to look like at that altitude?"

Marketing your research program at Kilimanjaro looks different from marketing it at Everest. Communication strategies that work for a single-school research lead do not automatically scale to network leadership. AI and data tools that are useful for one practitioner become genuinely transformative - or genuinely risky - at whole-school or system level. SAID is the reason why.

3. P:EAKS - The Capability Framework for Climbing at Altitude

P:EAKS is the capability framework that runs through every workstream on the day. It describes five dimensions of demand-enabling capability that every research leader needs - at every altitude - but that each look different depending on the demand level under which they are currently focused or operating.

P:EAKS is not a checklist. It is a diagnostic. The question is not 'do I have this capability?' but 'is my capability in this dimension sufficient for the demand I am or will be placing on it?'

	Capability	What It Means	The Diagnostic Question
P	Performance	Translating research into minimum, measurable outcomes and changed practice that will meet the Demand objectives and outcomes.	<i>What does success actually look like - in your school, for your project?</i>
E	Energy	Having the resources for sustaining momentum through the grind of complex, extended change.	<i>Where is your energy leaking? What replenishes it? Who shares the load?</i>
A	Accountability	Clear ownership of who is responsible for outcomes at each stage.	<i>Who owns this climb? Is that distributed appropriately, or concentrated in one person?</i>
K	Knowledge	The specific literacy and / or data needed now and at the next demand level - and what becomes redundant.	<i>What do you need to learn? What do you need to unlearn? Who can help?</i>
S	Sustainability	Embedding capability so the climb continues beyond any one person's involvement.	<i>Will this practice outlast you? Are you building the team's capability or your own?</i>

During the day, each workstream will use P:EAKS as its diagnostic structure. As you navigate through each of the Marketing, Communications, or AI & Data sessions, you will be asked to examine that capability through all five P:EAKS lenses - not just the obvious ones. A Marketing session, for example, is not just a Knowledge question (what do I know about research communication?). It is also an Energy question (how much does sustained advocacy cost me?), an Accountability question (who owns the case for research in my school?), and a Sustainability question (am I building a system, or just giving a better pitch?).

4. The Three Workstreams - What Each One Is For

On the day, following the Keynote which will introduce 'Strategy & Purpose' as the 'Demand / Performance Link', you will attend three workstreams. Each is built around a specific capability domain - but all three are interrogated through the same P:EAKS framework and anchored to the same Strategy & Purpose foundation.

Strategy & Purpose is the foundational layer for all three workstreams.

Your anchor: 'What is my research strategy purpose and in service of?'

Defining what your next mountain actually is, what success looks like, why it is vital, who is accountable, and how the strategy is resourced, sustained, and evolves.

This keeps all three workstreams connected - regardless of order you attend the sessions.

Workstream	What it develops	The P:EAKS question it stress-tests most
Marketing & Selling Research Value	Building the case for your research practice with staff, leadership, governors, and community - and sustaining it over time.	<i>Accountability (who owns this?) and Energy (how do you sustain advocacy through resistance and change?).</i>
Communications & Influencing Engagement	Leading professional dialogue, handling scepticism, and building a culture of evidence-informed conversation that doesn't depend on your personal presence.	<i>Energy (sustained influence is expensive) and Sustainability (are you building capability in others?).</i>
AI & Data Leverage / Evidence	Using data and AI tools purposefully in research leadership - grounded in strategy, not tool-led - and building team-wide capability.	<i>Knowledge (what do you need, and what becomes redundant?) and Performance (are you measuring the right things?).</i>

5. What This Means for You on the Day

The opening keynote (40 minutes) will bring the mountaineering metaphor, SAID, and P:EAKS to life through story and experience. It will help you confirm your current altitude, name your next mountain, and understand what the day's workstreams are designed to help you develop.

You will then attend three workstream sessions. Each session facilitator will:

- Have awareness of the Strategy & Purpose anchors – calibrating presentations to participant needs.
- Help you develop your capabilities through the P:EAKS diagnostic lens - not just as generic skill-building, but as strategic and purposeful altitude preparation and measurable progress.
- Close with a Personal Kit Bag reflection - three things you are taking back to school.

The closing debrief will ask you three questions that the whole day is designed to help you answer:

1. What is my next mountain?
2. What is my biggest P:EAKS gap relative to that mountain?
3. What is the first thing I will do differently when I get back to school on Monday?

The survey that follows is designed to help you begin thinking about these questions before you arrive - and to help us shape the day so that it meets you where you are, not where we assume you to be.

Ready to complete the survey?

Turn to the next page - or follow the link provided in your conference registration email.