

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE FRAMEWORK (KEF) CONSULTATION JANUARY 2019

Submission from the British Academy

March 2019

1. Do you consider that the KEF as outlined will fulfil its stated purposes?

- To provide universities with new tools to understand, benchmark and improve their performance.
- To provide business and other users with more information on universities.
- To provide greater public visibility and accountability. *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	No opinion
To provide universities with new tools to understand, benchmark and improve their performance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To provide businesses and other users with more information on universities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To provide greater public visibility and accountability.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please provide a commentary in relation to your scores above. (400 word limit)

The British Academy believes that the seven perspectives across which the Framework will measure do represent a broad definition of Knowledge Exchange that is differentiated from academic impact in the REF, and that allows for Knowledge Exchange as relevant to the humanities and social sciences, the disciplines the Academy represents, to be captured. There is potential for the outcomes of the Framework to be helpful to universities in understanding their performance in Knowledge Exchange activities, as long as some of the concerns we raise below about burden for example are addressed. It is less clear that the outcomes will be accessible to businesses, who generally require more specific information, or would be of interest to a wider public.

2. Aims and overall approach of the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF)

Overall approach

The KEF consultation document describes the overall approach as being an annual, institutional level, largely metrics driven exercise, although noting that narrative will have an important role. More background may be found in the report summarising the recommendations of the technical advisory group. Do you consider this overall approach to be appropriate? *

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- No opinion

Please provide a commentary in relation to your scores above. (400 word limit)

The British Academy is pleased to see that concerns we previously raised about the limitations of using HE-BCI survey data as proxy indicators for knowledge exchange in the arts, humanities and social sciences have gone some way to being addressed through the design of the Framework (for example by the addition of narrative elements for some indicators). We are, however, concerned about the burden on universities, departments and individual academic staff if the KEF is carried out as an annual exercise. There is also a risk that this may increase as the KEF develops or as funding potentially becomes attached to KEF results.

3. Clustering

The English higher education sector is very diverse. We therefore propose to create clusters of knowledge exchange peer groups. The proposed clusters and clustering approach is detailed in the KEF consultation document. Please use the following questions to provide your feedback on our proposals.

Please indicate your degree of support for the following aspects of our clustering approach. *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	No opinion
The conceptual framework that underpins the cluster analysis.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The variables and methods employed in undertaking the cluster analysis.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The resulting make up of the clusters, i.e. the membership.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
That the overall approach to clustering helps Research England to meet the stated purposes of the KEF and ensures fair comparison.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please provide commentary on any aspect of your scores above. If relevant please incorporate suggestions for alternative arrangements. (400 word limit)

The British Academy is content that universities are clustered in groups of comparable research intensity (amongst other metrics) as to lower the degree of confounding knowledge exchange with research-oriented metrics. We regard the differentiation of research intensive universities with high volumes of STEM and clinical medicine research from those with less of no clinical medicine research particularly helpful, as these can be distorting factors when metrics are based on monetary measures, given the high costs associated with research in these subjects.

We would, however, like to point at the continuing heterogeneity between universities within the identified clusters, especially Cluster X, where specialist social sciences cohabit with those having STEM departments and most likely engaging in STEM research. In section 7 of this submission, we argue that, while we appreciate the conceptually wider scope of knowledge exchange to be captured in the Framework, there is an inherent bias present in many of the metrics which would give those institutions with STEM departments an advantage.

We also have concerns about the SSB cluster, which seems to us to capture several institutions which do not focus on disciplines which are typically understood as social sciences or business (Bishop Grosseteste and the National Film and Television School). We would suggest that these individual cases should be reviewed. Heythrop College has closed in 2018 and should be removed from the list.

If you are responding on behalf of an institution that is a member of the proposed specialist social science and business (SSB) or STEM clusters as listed below and you wish to provide specific feedback on the appropriateness of these clusters, please identify your cluster membership here.

SSB

- University College Birmingham
- Bishop Grosseteste University
- Heythrop College, University of London
- London Business School
- National Film and Television School

STEM

- The Institute of Cancer Research
- Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine
- London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine
- Royal Veterinary College
- St George's, University of London
- Cranfield University
- Harper Adams University
- Royal Agricultural University
- Writtle University College

Listed above and wish to provide further comment

Not applicable

4. Perspectives and metrics

Knowledge exchange covers an extremely diverse range of activity and it is appropriate that some HEIs will perform more strongly in different areas that align more closely with their mission and strategic goals. We have therefore proposed a range of seven perspectives. The following questions will seek your views on the number and range of perspectives and metrics proposed

Perspectives

- Research partnerships
- Working with business
- Working with the public and third sector
- Skills, enterprise and entrepreneurship
- Local growth and regeneration
- IP and commercialisation
- Public and community engagement

Taking into account the overall range of perspectives and metrics outlined in the consultation document, do you agree or disagree that a sufficiently broad range of KE activities is captured. *

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- No opinion

Comments:

We think that these perspectives are broad and comprehensive and have gone some way to address our concerns about definition in the initial call for evidence (January 2018).

We are pleased that the metrics will be normalised by size of institution where appropriate using academic staff FTE, which helps to address concerns about the KEF privileging large institutions which are already strong in this area.

However, we do note that the metrics mostly measure ‘quantity’ of knowledge exchange activity rather than ‘quality’. While this is inevitable in an exercise which uses existing data and is intended to be low burden, it will be important that this is clear in public communications about the KEF, especially given the intended aims of providing more information for businesses and the wider public.

Employing a % sliding scale measure in the item below, appears to be a very useful and innovative way to proxy the respondents’ assumption about the performance of each metric. We have understood this as answering the question ‘what is the percentage of activity in each domain that can be captured by the metrics?’ (by which we mean all knowledge exchange activities, not just those from the arts, humanities and social sciences, which we represent). If this is case, then a change in wording to reflect this would be very helpful in future.

Taking into account the range of metrics outlined in the consultation document, please indicate [using a % sliding scale] whether you consider that they adequately represent performance in each of the proposed perspectives.

Research partnerships	<input type="text" value="75%"/>
Working with business	<input type="text" value="50%"/>
Working with the public and third sector	<input type="text" value="25%"/>

Skills, enterprise and entrepreneurship	50%
Local growth and regeneration	50%
IP and commercialisation	75%
Public and community engagement	25%

Research partnerships

Taking into account the range of metrics outlined in the consultation document for this perspective, please provided any comments on the balance and coverage of the proposed metrics. (400 word limit)

The British Academy is aware, that any attempt to capture these significant and nuanced areas of activity will be imperfect. But we think that given the data already available and the need to avoid unnecessarily increasing burden on universities, and that new data collection is being pursued for the metric on co-authorship with non-academic partners, the proposal is a pragmatic approach.

Working with business

Taking into account the range of metrics outlined in the consultation document for this perspective, please provided any comments on the balance and coverage of the proposed metrics. (400 word limit)

The British Academy is concerned about giving undue weight to formal research income as per HE-BCI table 1b (research income with businesses per FTE) and table 2 (Consultancy income with businesses per FTE) for two reasons:

First, collaborative formal research often takes place in technological, bioscience etc. research and development. In contrast, innovation occurring in the services sector, which represents over 80% of the British economy, is not well captured by metrics capturing formal research collaboration. In knowledge-intensive services, e.g. in professional services, this often takes the form of highly context specific, 'tacit knowledge,' transmitted via formal but also frequently informal, if not unplanned, means of face to face communication. Therefore, the consultancy metric HE-BCI table 2 will capture only a small share of KE in the knowledge intensive professional services. It will fail to capture any knowledge exchange in the arts and creative sector, another of the UK's tradable knowledge intensive services.

Second, the extent of involvement with businesses will be skewed towards high cost, laboratory settings, as captured by table 1b, while consultancy requires low if any investment and its cost metric might not represent the full monetary value to the business.

Working with the public and third sector

Taking into account the range of metrics outlined in the consultation document for this perspective, please provide any comments on the balance and coverage of the proposed metrics. (400 word limit)

Knowledge exchange with the public and third sector often takes place outside formal contracts to an even larger degree than is the case with businesses. Many university staff, especially in the social sciences, advise government entities by submitting contributions to calls for evidence, through their membership of boards, advisory panels, etc. – but also often by informal modes through personal networks. These activities do not result in any income for the university but are carried out as part of the civic contribution which universities make to wider society.

As mentioned above, we believe that the specific qualities of knowledge production and dissemination in the arts, humanities and social sciences mean it is not well captured by metrics that express only monetised formalised knowledge exchange through formal research or consultancy contracts. We are particularly concerned that as a result of a future funding allocation implications of KEF, HEIs might have an incentive to reduce their involvement in providing advice to the public and third sector in a non-contractual manner, free of charge.

Consequently, we suggest universities should be able to submit an additional narrative as evidence against this perspective.

Skills, enterprise and entrepreneurship

Taking into account the range of metrics outlined in the consultation document for this perspective, please provide any comments on the balance and coverage of the proposed metrics. (400 word limit)

The British Academy welcomes the inclusion of this metric. We do have some concern that HE-BCI table 2 especially, will be influenced by regional variations in local business demand for continuing professional development rather than indicating a university's willingness to engage in such activities. We also note that practice in how CPD is provided varies by employment sector, for example in terms of whether it is offered by universities or by other training providers, or on the job. The subject areas in which CPD provision is needed is also determined by employment need, with high demand in health care and business and management. HEIs in peripheral locations with provision in particular subject areas might be disadvantaged due to the lack of local demand for CPD.

Local growth and regeneration

Taking into account the range of metrics outlined in the consultation document for this perspective, please provide any comments on the balance and coverage of the proposed metrics. (400 word limit)

Note there is a separate question to consider the use of supplementary narrative.

This metric is largely based on levels of European Regional Development Funding (ERDF) and European Social Funding (ESF), or, after the UK leaves the EU, equivalent UK Government funding. The metric therefore merely replicates regional variations in income, on which different levels of funding are based on. ERDF and ESF funding will be partially a function of the regional level of per capita regional economic activity and levels of deprivation and is not subject to agency by the HEI.

IP and commercialisation

Taking into account the range of metrics outlined in the consultation document for this perspective, please provide any comments on the balance and coverage of the proposed metrics. (400 word limit)

The British Academy appreciates the difficulty in finding appropriate indicators for expressing innovation and cooperation with external institutions. We believe, however, that giving patents an undue weight (as eg in Table 4a) risk skewing the metric towards research activity in patentable knowledge, which mostly encompasses STEM subjects. While this issue has been partially addressed by clustering universities for the purposes of benchmarking, as discussed above Cluster X contains institutions both with and without STEM departments. As a result, the variance between universities in this metric will be partially a function of the share of STEM research.

Public and community engagement

Taking into account the range of metrics outlined in the consultation document for this perspective, please provide any comments on the balance and coverage of the proposed metrics. (400 word limit)

Note there is a separate question to consider the use of supplementary narrative.

Measurement of knowledge exchange through community engagement is particularly difficult to operationalise, and we have reservations towards using attendance figures as in HE-BCI, Table 5, 'Exhibitions (galleries, museums, etc.)' and 'Museum education.' The existence of a gallery or museum as a part of the respective university is largely due to the history of the institution, and circumstances will vary widely across the sector. Moreover, attendance figures do not in themselves demonstrate that knowledge exchange has taken place.

We are also concerned at use of a metric on 'time per academic staff FTE committed to public and community engagement' because this is open to exploitation, with staff being asked to take on additional commitments which may not necessarily form part of their agreed workload. It is also only an input measure, that does not necessarily demonstrate the value of the activities involved.

We therefore agree that a supplementary narrative is needed for this perspective to ensure that universities can explain the range of activities they undertake with the public and communities where knowledge exchange takes place.

We would recommend that Research England explore further how this perspective might be measured with NCCPE (the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement).

5. Supplementary narrative

We consider that for two perspectives, that on their own, the existing metrics do not provide sufficient measure of the scale and variety of activities undertaken by higher education institutions (HEIs).

We intend to work with the sector to develop, where possible, metrics that will capture the outcomes derived from all types of knowledge exchange in the future. In the mean time we propose to supplement both the Local Growth & Regeneration and Public & Community Engagement perspectives by requesting a narrative statement from each provider to set out the main strategic goals, activities, outputs and potential outcomes achieved.

Do you consider it appropriate for HEIs to provide narrative text to support the metrics in perspectives that don't currently have fully developed metrics? *

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- No opinion

Public and community engagement narrative

Overall, is the guidance on the provision of narrative text for this perspective clear. *

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Somewhat agree

- Agree
 Strongly agree
 No opinion

Please comment on the proposal to include narrative from HEIs for the public and community engagement perspective, in particular: - where further clarification is required- where refinements could be made- whether there are areas where more consistency across HEIs could be achieved (400 word limit)

We believe these are appropriate sections to be supplemented in this way, though we suggest above that capturing the full range of activity within 'work with the public and third sector' may also benefit from additional narrative information. Universities and their representatives will be better placed to comment on the clarity of the guidance.

We would welcome further clarity on how the qualitative narratives will be assessed, and how this will feed into the visualisations of outcomes.

Local growth and regeneration narrative

Overall, is the guidance on the provision of narrative text for this perspective clear. *

- Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Somewhat disagree
 Somewhat agree
 Agree
 Strongly agree
 No opinion

Please comment on the proposal to include narrative from HEIs for the local growth and regeneration perspective, in particular:

- where further clarification is required
- where refinements could be made
- whether there are areas where more consistency across HEIs could be achieved (400 word limit)

The role of further narrative or contextual information

We welcome responses on what other types of narrative or contextual information would be helpful.

You may wish to consider, for example:

- Should the HEI or Research England provide other narrative information?
- How should we use other contextual information, such as information on local economic competitiveness described in section 5 of the cluster analysis report?
- Would other perspectives benefit significantly from further narrative information?
- Would the benefit of adding further narrative information be outweighed by the burden of doing so? *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	No opinion
Overarching institutional statement - provided by the HEI	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Overarching institutional statement - provided by Research England	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Comments:

Contextual information provided by Research England employing a standard methodology, as for example in cluster analysis reports, could provide useful further information to enable businesses and the wider public to interpret the KEF outcomes. An overarching statement provided by a university outlining their strategic approach to knowledge exchange may also add value, but clear parameters for this would need to be set to ensure it did not create additional burden.

As above, we suggest that ‘work with the public and third sector’ may also benefit from additional narrative information

6. Visualisation

We have provided further information including example visualisations of the KEF within the consultation document.

Visualisation

Please indicate [using a % slider scale] your level of support for the proposed method of comparison and visualisation

Each of the seven perspectives is to be given equal weighting.

75%

Metrics under each perspective are to be normalised and summed.

75%

The performance of each HEI is to be expressed in a radar chart in deciles, relative to the mean average decile of the peer group.

100%

Perspectives are not intended to be aggregated into a single score.

100%

Narratives are to be presented alongside the metric score, making it clear that metrics in the two perspectives of public & community engagement and local growth & regeneration are provisional, and should be read in conjunction with the narratives.

100%

Visualisation is to be delivered through an interactive, online dashboard which will allow exploration of the data underlying the 'headline' results in various ways.

100%

Please comment on the presentation and visualisation proposals, for example:

- where further clarification is required
- where refinements could be made
- whether there are areas where more consistency across HEIs could be achieved- how narratives could be incorporated?
(400 word limit)

The guidelines for visualisation of the quantitative metrics are sound, but how this is combined with qualitative information needs to be considered carefully. There is also danger that the qualitative elements could be ignored by users of the data outside Research England, such as by business or in 'league tables', disadvantaging some universities with strong performance in areas captured in the narrative submissions. The presentation will need to be very clear in signposting to these additional elements.

7. Implementation

We will pilot the implementation with a group of HEIs as described in the consultation document.

Please provide any comments about the implementation of the KEF. (200 word limit)

We think this is sensible and have no further points of concern.

8. Any other comments

If you have any other comments, please share them here. (400 word limit)

The British Academy welcomes the inclusive approach to the definition of knowledge exchange which Research England have adopted in developing proposals for the KEF. Our principal outstanding conceptual concern is that knowledge exchange is highly dependent not just on the agency of universities but also on the ability and willingness of businesses, the public and third sector. Any framework for capturing knowledge exchange can go some way to measuring the outcome of an exchange where this has taken place but cannot control for regional variations across the UK in the ability and capacity of business and the public sector to engage.