



Call to submit evidence to the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) metrics technical advisory group

Submission from the British Academy
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QUESTION 1: What approaches and data need to be used to ensure a fair and meaningful comparison between different universities, taking into account factors that might impact individual institution's knowledge exchange performance (such as research income, size or local economic conditions), whilst allowing identification of relative performance? How should benchmarking be used?

1. The purpose of the KEF and definition of 'knowledge exchange' need to be clarified

The answers to all the questions in this call for evidence depend on what behaviours this framework is trying to monitor or incentivise and consequently the definition of knowledge exchange (KE) adopted to achieve this purpose. This needs to be clear first before developing measures or considering how to standardise data for benchmarking.

The Industrial Strategy published November 2017¹ gave a very broad understanding of knowledge exchange stating that the KEF:

- *"will benchmark how well universities are doing at fostering knowledge sharing and research commercialisation.*
- *will capture the rich network of collaborations between universities and businesses.*
- *will sit alongside the REF and the TEF, providing a holistic view of how universities are delivering their threefold mission of generating knowledge through research, transmitting knowledge through teaching, and translating knowledge into practical uses through knowledge exchange.*"

Additionally, at the launch event October 2017², the then Universities Minister Jo Johnson stated that

- *"Public attention often focuses on technology transfer, intellectual property (IP) licensing and high-tech spin-outs, but these are far from the only way universities contribute to innovation and growth. Collaborative and contract research conducted with businesses, consultancy, training, and broader partnerships with businesses and with civil society are every bit as important.*"

Both the Industrial Strategy and the minister's announcement show that the government sees knowledge exchange as wider than technology transfer and including civic and societal benefits. However, the two key strands of the KEF according to information provided by HEFCE to date are much narrower. The first strand, the 'KEF principles'³, focuses on good practice in technology transfer only, and the second 'KEF metrics'⁴ strand, including this call for evidence, is consulting on the use of the HE-BCI survey which is also fairly narrow in scope, although it does include some elements of community engagement.

The disciplines of the social sciences and humanities, and graduates in these fields that the British Academy represents, are at the heart of the most productive sectors in the UK economy such as the creative industries and financial, legal and professional services.⁵ Capturing and incentivising knowledge exchange by these disciplines to these sectors is of

¹ Industrial Strategy Building a Britain fit for the future

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664563/industrial-strategy-white-paper-web-ready-version.pdf

² How universities can drive prosperity through deeper engagement

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/how-universities-can-drive-prosperity-through-deeper-engagement>

³ HEFCE KEF Principles <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/ke/kef/principles/>

⁴ HEFCE KEF Metrics <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/ke/kef/metrics/>

⁵ British Academy 2017 'The most important challenges of our time'

<https://www.britac.ac.uk/sites/default/files/The%20most%20important%20challenges%20of%20our%20time.pdf>

national strategic importance, as they are major contributors to local, regional and national growth.

The British Academy only sees value in a framework that reflects the broader vision laid out in the Industrial Strategy and the ministerial statement quoted above, and which therefore adequately captures the 'third mission' of university activity in parallel to teaching and research. If the KEF is to reflect these broader aims it must capture the full range of knowledge exchange activities universities undertake. These include engaging with, supporting, and developing local, national and international communities, supporting the third sector, as well as collaborating with business, and undertaking technology transfer. We anticipate there will be greater detail and clarity on the purpose of the KEF and the definition of knowledge exchange in the proposals due to be released later in 2018, and we hope there will be opportunities to reconsider metrics at that stage.

2. Differentiation needed from 'impact' as captured in the REF

Clarity is needed about how the KEF is to be distinguished from the impact element of the Research Excellence Framework (REF). In adopting a wider definition of impact, as proposed by Lord Stern's Independent Review, the REF already provides a mechanism for capturing many dimensions or types of knowledge exchange.

At the launch event in October 2017, then Universities Minister Jo Johnson stated that the KEF would be a "*comprehensive range of measures of impact from collaboration and knowledge exchange.*"⁶ There is a clear risk of both duplication in effort for institutions and potential 'double counting' in assessment between the KEF and the impact element of the REF, unless clear, and distinct, definitions are adopted.

The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) also measures the aspects of knowledge exchange concerning the diffusion of knowledge and development of skills and human capital. In particular, many professionals are prepared for professional practice through a university education at undergraduate or masters level, and then continue to update their professional knowledge through continuing professional development (CPD) provision.

If the KEF is focused only on the aspects of knowledge exchange which are not covered by the REF and TEF, then this will inevitably mean adopting a very limited definition of knowledge exchange, which will present a distorted picture of the nature of this activity within UK higher education institutions. If the broader definition is adopted, then mechanisms will be needed to handle overlap between assessment processes, or a more extensive consultation and development period may be required to ensure distinction from the REF and TEF.

The British Academy is concerned about potential duplication and additional burden on universities and departments if the distinction between impact in the REF and what is to be measured through the KEF is not clarified. The Academy would encourage HEFCE to be clear about how the KEF will add value to existing measures and avoid double counting with impact captured in the REF.

3. Benchmarking and data standardisation methods should reflect the aim of the KEF and guard against 'knowledge exchange intensification' based on measures of income generation

⁶ How universities can drive prosperity through deeper engagement
<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/how-universities-can-drive-prosperity-through-deeper-engagement>

The types of knowledge exchange that universities or departments set out to do can vary greatly, depending on factors including institutional mission and geographical location. The way that knowledge exchange performance data is standardised for benchmarking should depend upon what outcomes are intended to be monitored or what activities incentivised. For example, many measures of knowledge exchange for creative activities would be potentially very different from STEM fields and more local and context-specific, and metrics should be careful to both capture the diversity of university activities and combine them in the same framework.

The time frames over which knowledge exchange takes place can also differ between disciplines. These processes might be more gradual but also more enduring for the humanities and social sciences. The development and use of metrics would need to be appropriately sensitive to these factors.

If the intention is to define knowledge exchange broadly (an aim we would strongly support), so that it recognises activity and excellence in all types of knowledge exchange, across all disciplines, regardless of size of institution or department, then the metrics will have to normalise for these factors, as well as for location and mission.

At the launch event October 2017⁷, the then Minister for Universities stated: *“Given the importance of knowledge exchange to the national mission of universities, I believe there is a strong case for doing more to measure how good a job universities are doing and to link funding more directly to such an assessment.”*

This suggests that the KEF may be linked to funding such as HEIF in the future. If the KEF outcomes are mainly based on knowledge exchange income and expenditure and reward this with additional funding, there is a risk that the process will work only to incentivise knowledge exchange that is measured in these terms, as well as to concentrate such activity within universities that are already successful. This will overlook the broader activities of knowledge exchange and the potential for spreading good practice across the whole of the UK to achieve *“improving the incentives, processes and skills that support the flow of knowledge and ideas around society”*, as stated in the Industrial Strategy⁸.

Further, for the KEF to become a valid funding mechanism, it would have to use a distinct set of indicators from the REF, otherwise it would simply reproduce the outcomes of the REF and unjustifiably further concentrate funding.

The British Academy suggests that if funding decisions are to be based on the KEF, the Framework should capture measures and indicators of knowledge exchange beyond income to avoid a situation of existing funding simply generating further funding. The KEF would also have to avoid any duplication and double counting with the REF. The British Academy anticipates receiving greater clarity on the aim of the KEF later in the year and will welcome the chance to consider data standardisation and benchmarking when more is known.

⁷ How universities can drive prosperity through deeper engagement

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/how-universities-can-drive-prosperity-through-deeper-engagement>

⁸ Industrial Strategy Building a Britain fit for the future

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664563/industrial-strategy-white-paper-web-ready-version.pdf

QUESTION 2: Other than HE-BCI survey data, what other existing sources of data could be used to inform a framework, and how should it be used?

4. The HE-BCI survey is narrow and the KEF will need to draw on additional evidence to add value, and metrics alone may not suffice

Again, there are the questions of what the KEF aims to monitor and performance-manage and of the definition of knowledge exchange. See Point 1 above. If the intention for the KEF is to be narrow in scope and reward patents, licences, spin-offs, research income and income from services, then the data available through the HE-BCI survey already fits this requirement. But if the intention is to be broader, along the lines of the Industrial Strategy and “capture the rich network of collaborations between universities and businesses”⁹, the KEF will need to draw on a wider evidence base, going beyond metrics.

The HEFCE ‘Knowledge Exchange Performance Indicator’ dataset¹⁰ draws upon the HE-BCI survey but adds HESA finance and staffing data. However, it does not include the public engagement statistics in Table 5 of the HE-BCI survey¹¹ which capture some of these broader dimensions of knowledge exchange:

- Public lectures
- Performance arts (music, dance, drama etc.)
- Exhibitions (galleries, museums etc.)
- Museum education

However, even this element of the HE-BCI survey does not cover the full varieties of activities, and the range of settings of knowledge exchange; there are significant omissions around outreach within communities and policy engagement and development.

The REF impact case studies provide good insight into knowledge exchange activities and offer a potential model to qualitatively capture the full range of knowledge exchange activities and benefits, including those delivered by the humanities and social sciences. However, the case studies are out of date until the process is repeated for REF 2021. The Impact section of REF 2021 could provide useful evidence of knowledge exchange, but this point raises again the question of how the KEF will measure something distinctive, and whether a new framework is necessary.

The British Academy suggest that if the KEF is to add value, it should go beyond simply repurposing HE-BCI, and as a bare minimum the KEF should draw upon the results of the entire HE-BCI survey including ‘Table 5: Social, community and cultural engagement: designated public events’. We support the aim to use a range of sources, or even commission new collections, so that the KEF can be aligned with the government’s own intentions for the Framework. However, the Academy is concerned about additional burden on institutions and departments to meet the requirements of the KEF and therefore, if a case study approach is adopted, overlap with the impact element of the REF needs careful consideration to avoid duplication.

QUESTION 3: What new (or not currently collected) data might be useful to such a framework?

6. Many aspects of knowledge exchange cannot be quantified

⁹ Industrial Strategy Building a Britain fit for the future

¹⁰ HEFCE ‘KEPI’ dataset <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/ke/KEportal/ccake/>

¹¹ HEFCE HE-BCI data <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/ke/hebci/>

While the HE-BCI is the most relevant data collection currently available, it does not capture the full range of activities and outcomes of knowledge exchange if broadly conceived. Further, many knowledge exchange activities and outcomes cannot be easily quantified through metrics in a way which measures that exchange of knowledge has taken place. For example, for public engagement activities, one of the most common areas of knowledge exchange for the humanities¹², attendance numbers only go so far as a measure of impact.

The elusiveness of knowledge exchange to data-capture was noted by HEFCE and RAND 2015 in an assessment of REF 2014 impact case studies, stating that research impact included *“Public engagement impacts, where impact beyond the dissemination activity is difficult to trace.”*¹³

Other less tangible or measurable outcomes of knowledge exchange include:

- communicating research to policy makers, charities and local government through written and oral evidence or as expert witnesses
- developing and sharing best practice in business, e.g. through informing professionals
- helping to develop school curricula
- cultural exchanges that take place outside public spaces such as in the home through TV, radio and the internet

The British Academy recommends that for the KEF to be truly valuable as a yardstick for knowledge exchange, and if it is to inform funding allocations, the full diversity of knowledge exchange needs to be captured. This will entail the Framework including qualitative elements, for example through a case-study approach.

QUESTION 4: How should KEF metrics be visualised to ensure they are simple, transparent and useful to a non-specialist audience?

7. Visualisation of KEF metrics needs to reflect the intended purpose of KEF and the audiences which are likely to make use of the outcomes

It is helpful that the question of how the outcomes of the KEF will be communicated is being considered at the outset of the design of the Framework. However, a number of issues need to be clarified before this can be addressed, namely the purpose of the Framework and what it is intended to measure, as well as whether this can be measured, and hence communicated solely by metrics.

The purpose of the Framework and the breadth of the definition of knowledge exchange adopted will determine the audience which is likely to make use of its outcomes. Even so, due consideration needs to be given to whether the information which KEF metrics will convey will be of any value to the constituencies with whom universities engage in knowledge exchange activities.

For example, businesses choose which universities to develop relationships with on the basis of specific expertise or location rather than amount of income previously generated, although evidence of previous success in knowledge exchange may be useful reinforcing

¹² KCL The nature, scale and beneficiaries of research impact <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/policy-institute/publications/Analysis-of-REF-impact.pdf>

¹³ HEFCE and RAND Preparing impact submissions for REF 2014: An evaluation http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Pubs/Independentresearch/2015/REF,impact,submissions/REF_impact_prep_process-findings.pdf

information. Charities or local communities looking to engage with a university will need different information.

The British Academy recommends that visualisation of KEF outcomes should be revisited once the purpose of the KEF has been clarified, as this will allow appropriate audiences to be identified.

QUESTION 5: Any other comments?

8. More details on the purpose and definition of the KEF are needed before confirming the metrics of the Framework

This call for evidence is taking place ahead of publication of, and consultation on, more detailed proposals for the shape of the KEF, which are expected in Spring or Summer 2018.

The British Academy hopes that there will be opportunity to return to these questions regarding metrics once the purpose of the KEF, the definition of knowledge exchange, and how it will add value to existing measures in the REF, TEF and HE-BCI survey have been clarified.

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