



Working with Universities

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Overview

The purpose of this document is to help clarify some of the terms used by universities when discussing collaborative research or knowledge exchange projects, and to provide some guidance on working with universities.

You may find this guide useful if you are a practitioner in the arts or culture sector, part of an arts organisation or an arts facilitator considering working with a university or an individual researcher.

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Understanding the Higher Education Funding Landscape

Under the wider umbrella of UK Research and Innovation (often referred to as UKRI), there are seven research councils with specific disciplinary remits that distribute Government funding across the sciences, arts and humanities. Only researchers employed by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are eligible to apply for funding from the research councils.

The councils are:

AHRC - Arts & Humanities

ESRC - Economics & Social Sciences

EPSRC - Engineering & Physical Sciences

NERC - Natural Environment

BBSRC - Biotechnology & Biological Sciences

MRC - Medical

STFC - Science & Technology

Most research funding for disciplines in the arts and culture sectors will be drawn from the **Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)** and **the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC)**. Although frequently artistic and cultural practitioners may also work with scientists who may be seeking funds from other councils.

Under the UKRI umbrella are also two agencies, **Research England** and **Innovate UK** that fund initiatives which cut across the wider research landscape. Innovate UK tends to fund more business-led research, whilst Research England funds activities that support the wider research infrastructure.

There are other major UK-based funders such as the **Wellcome Trust**, **British Academy** or **Leverhulme Trust**, who may support collaborative projects through specific funding streams.

Common European funders include the **European Research Council (ERC)** and European Union who support the Horizon Europe fund and Marie Skłodowska Curie Fellowships. Funding is offered on a project basis to bring together a number of researchers from different international institutions and fellowships for individual researchers working on distinct projects.

Impact and Public Engagement

Impact is defined within Higher Education as a social, economic, environmental or cultural benefit derived from a piece of research or a research project. It is now often a requirement for recipients of research funding to demonstrate that their project or output has achieved wider societal impact.

Cultural organisations or practitioners may be involved in the research stage of a project, or in the impact generation stage. In order to demonstrate that impact has been achieved researchers need to prove that the activity undertaken has led to positive change for the general public or a specific group of people. These groups may be referred to as **impact beneficiaries**, especially in a REF impact study. Demonstrating successful impact is integral to every REF submission, so knowledge exchange projects can often be featured in REF Impact Case Studies.

‘REF’ or the Research Excellence Framework

One of Research England’s key responsibilities is to manage the distribution of £2 billion research funding to Higher Education providers. Money is allocated according to how well a Higher Education provider performs in the **Research Excellence Framework** (commonly referred to as **REF**). The last REF assessment point was 2021, with the next one expected towards the end of the decade. There were 1,075 case studies submitted to REF2021 that referenced arts and culture-related ‘impact’.

REF assesses research excellence on the basis of three elements:

the quality of **outputs** (frequently written documents such as articles or books but also research-driven performances and exhibitions) assessed by a panel of disciplinary peers, the **impact** of research beyond academia, assessed via an **impact case study**. One impact case study can secure more funding than one output, and the **environment** that supports research, assessed via **environment statements** that cover research strategy, investment, resources and support provided for researchers tailored to different career stages.

REF is designed to make research funding more effective and accountable by providing higher levels of funding to those organisations that produce world-leading and impactful research. Collaborative projects that result in a positive benefit to society, the economy, environment or culture may be featured in a REF Impact Case Study.

Public Engagement

Research impact may often start with **public engagement** activities such as talks and workshops.

The definition of Public Engagement endorsed by the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement is that it: “**describes the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit.**”

Although **public engagement** activities can lead to impact, this may not always be the purpose. Other common forms of cultural public engagement include festivals, exhibitions, conferences, performances, concerts, videos, podcasts or participatory arts and crafts events.

Knowledge Exchange (KE), Knowledge Transfer (KT) & 'KEF'

Knowledge exchange is defined within Higher Education as a two-way exchange between researchers and research users, to share ideas, research evidence, experiences and skills.

Knowledge transfer often refers to more unilateral exchanges between STEM subjects and businesses, and implies the process of research knowledge being imparted in order to benefit product development or service improvement.

Collaborations between universities and arts or cultural practitioners and organisations will usually be more interactive and mutually influential, and therefore referred to as knowledge exchange. Terms frequently used to describe KE projects include; co-creation/co-design, collaboration/collaborative design, creative exchange, art/cultural skills/leadership, partnership.

Research impact may or may not be the outcome of a KE collaboration.

Cultural Knowledge Exchange is a term widely used by NCACE that refers specifically to KE collaborations and interactions of all kinds between the arts and culture sectors and academia. Cultural Knowledge Exchange can take many forms and be of different durations, from one-off events to much longer term relationships, often between an arts or cultural organisation and a specific researcher or department within a university. It usually implies that both parties are involved in the development, sharing and/or co-creation of knowledge, creative projects or other resources or infrastructures.

Socially engaged research describes research with social or community engagement at its heart and the involvement of communities of practice in the research process itself. It might involve an academic partner and a community or particular interest group working together to co-create information, experience or knowledge and therefore often involves KE and social impact. It can also involve the university providing access to specialist equipment or facilities to community or cultural groups, or licensing patentable research findings.

If you are intimately involved in a knowledge exchange project, you may be referred to as a **collaborator** or **partner**. If you are slightly removed from the exchange processes, you may also be referred to as a **stakeholder**. The lead researchers on your project may be known by terms such as **PI** (or Principle Investigator - the ultimate project lead) or **Co-I** (Co-Investigator).

The **Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF)** is a 3 yearly exercise, first initiated in March 2021, that draws predominantly on existing annual data provided by universities to UKRI. In part, the process involves assessing against performance in the following areas:

research partnerships, eg collaborative research project with an external organisation contributing funding
working with business,
working with the public and third sector,
continuing professional development and graduate start ups,
local growth and regeneration,
intellectual property,
commercialisation
public and community engagement.

Underpinning this strategic understanding of knowledge exchange is the benefit to society and the economy. This means that researchers may be encouraged to create spin out companies that harness the innovative elements of research that can generate income.

Knowledge Transfer Partnerships

One of the less tangible methods in which knowledge can be 'exchanged' is through new graduates using what they learnt on their degrees to advance industry practices. **Knowledge Transfer Partnerships** and **Accelerated Knowledge Transfer to Innovate (AKT2I)** build on this type of industry advancement supported by Innovate UK. They represent a three-way partnership between a business, a graduate and a higher education institution focused on driving business-led innovation projects. AKT2I are aimed at accelerating the evaluation or development of an innovation project or concept, which has the potential for significant impact for the Business Partner. The lower financial obligations means that AKT2I are more suited to making change for arts and heritage organisations.

Approaching Universities

There are various routes into approaching collaborations with universities or academic researchers.

Professional teams who work in brokering impact and knowledge exchange may have titles such as; research and development/innovation, business and enterprise, research facilitators, impact facilitators, research managers, knowledge exchange managers, or public engagement. There may be an office of staff who form part of the central administrative function of the university, or there may be individuals embedded within academic departments who cover this remit.

If you want to work with a specific researcher or academic, feel free to contact them directly by email.

University websites always provide contact details both for individual academics and professional teams.

Other Organisations

In addition to NCACE, there are a number of other independent and university-led organisations that support and champion KE, Public Engagement, socially engaged research and arts-focussed policymaking.

Centre for Cultural Value is a national research centre based at the University of Leeds, with core partners The Audience Agency, The University of Liverpool, The University of Sheffield and Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh. CCV work alongside cultural practitioners and organisations, academics, funders and policymakers to summarise existing evidence to make relevant research more accessible, support the cultural sector to develop skills in research, evaluation and reflective practice, and shape policy development.

The Civic University Network is led by Sheffield Hallam University and supports universities across the UK to develop and embed civic aspirations at an institutional level, particularly through developing and publishing Civic University Agreements. The network works with governments and strategic cultural partners to ensure that a university's geographic role and responsibility is used more effectively as an agent to drive positive societal change through economic and cultural initiatives specific to the locale's individual circumstances.

Culture Commons are an independent organisation, funded by the AHRC and Arts Council England (amongst others), who work with creative businesses, the publicly funded cultural sector and the research community, regularly bringing them into dialogue with policy makers at the local and national levels - including local and combined authorities and national government.

Culture Forum North is an open network of partnerships between Higher Education and the cultural sector across the North, helping to develop innovative programmes that make a positive impact to society regionally and nationally.

NCCPE - the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement is based at the University of the West of England and supports excellent public engagement practice within the UK Higher Education sector through

the provision of tools and training, research and networking opportunities. They seek to create the conditions for public engagement to thrive in universities.

PEC - the **Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre** is led by NESTA and provides independent research and policy recommendations for the UK's creative industries.

Guide to Finances

Collaborations between universities and the arts may be funded through research grants, local authority funding or they may originate from project funding won by the cultural partner. Often there are multiple funders supporting a collaborative project. Researchers may offer their time in kind to activities, especially if they complement university requirements for public engagement or impact.

Budgets

For projects funded by research grants, in addition to any direct costs occurring through a project (for travel, subsistence, services, video editing etc), higher education institutions may also need to pay **overheads** relating to building upkeep, infrastructure or administrative functions. These will be calculated and budgeted for by the University, but the term 'overheads' may be used in contracts or communications.

HEIs may use the term **Full Economic Costing (FEC)** when discussing a project budget. This refers to project costs calculated to take into account overheads, VAT and staff costs including pensions and national insurance. VAT or Reverse VAT (for international payments) will also need to be covered in any project budget.

Payment or reimbursement

Universities are large institutions with separate finance and administrative departments, often referred to as Professional Services. Due to complex administrative structures, reimbursement can happen very quickly or very slowly.

All higher education institutions have to adhere to financial regulations that control what types of goods or services can be purchased. Be clear about what the **allowed costs** are for the project and what evidence is required in terms of receipts and/or invoices. If the project is funded externally from a research grant there may be additional requirements. It's advisable to talk to the research team and/or your finance or administrative contact before you submit your expense claim or invoice.

Find out what the process is for receiving payment or reimbursement and what the timeline is before you start a collaboration by speaking with the

researcher, finance officer or administrator managing the project's payments.

Have you been paid by this university before? If not, do you need to be set up as a **supplier** or **service provider** on their finance system in order to be paid?

What paperwork does that involve and how long does it take to be set up? Do you need to quote a **purchase order** or **requisition number** on your invoice to prevent any delays? This process ensures that costs quoted align with costs invoiced.

Do **payment runs** go out on certain dates and when do invoices need to be received to ensure they are processed in time for that date?

Intellectual property

When collaborating with a researcher, it is worth discussing who owns the **intellectual property** related to a project, particularly if it involves producing a creative work. Intellectual property broadly falls into two areas: **copyrights and related rights** such as literary and artistic works, databases, reference works, computer programs, and technical drawings **industrial property rights** including trademarks, patents and industrial designs.

Knowledge Exchange collaborators may wish to formalise an agreement over intellectual property rights, either through a **contract or Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)**.

There may also be requirements for all collaborators to agree to **safeguarding policies**, or apply for **ethical clearance** (especially if working with children or young people).

Funding for Impact and Knowledge Exchange

Impact and KE projects may seek funding from the following places:

Innovation – AHRC – UKRI - this page provides details of seven funding opportunities managed by the AHRC which support creative knowledge exchange and impact.

UKRI Funding Finder - provides details of specific project funds, some of which may specify working with a non-HEI partner.

UKRI Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) allocates money to HE providers who meet a performance threshold. This is based on income received from its non-academic users and data submitted to higher education data gathering agencies such as the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, now part of Jisc) and Innovate UK. Money from HEIF can sometimes be referred to as the **University Impact Fund** and will be managed by a university.

UKRI Impact Acceleration Accounts (IAA) come through the different funding councils and go to universities in order to maximise impact, knowledge exchange, commercialise research and advance changes to public policy/services.

UKRI/Innovate UK Knowledge Transfer Partnership & Accelerated Knowledge Transfer to Innovate AKT2I (described above).

Arts Council England will fund elements of artistic practice that support research e.g. funding for a performance a researcher creates or contributes to as part of an artistic ensemble.

National Civic Impact Accelerator – Civic University Network

Funding - Centre for Cultural Value The Collaborate Fund offers support for the development of collaborative research projects between UK cultural practitioners and academics.

There are various routes towards securing funding for collaborative projects or activities and it is worth paying attention to wider funding initiatives such as the Levelling Up Fund.

Further Resources

[Skills and Capacity for Knowledge Exchange with the Arts and Cultural Sector - National Centre for Academic and Cultural Exchange \(ncace.ac.uk\)](https://www.ncace.ac.uk)

[Toolkits and Skills for Knowledge Exchange - National Centre for Academic and Cultural Exchange \(ncace.ac.uk\)](https://www.ncace.ac.uk)

[Collaborating with Higher Education Institutions: Findings from NCACE Survey with Arts Professional](https://www.ncace.ac.uk)

[The Role of 'Place' in Collaborations Between HEIs and the Arts and Cultural Sector \(ncace.ac.uk\)](https://www.ncace.ac.uk)

[Exploring value in KE collaborations between higher education... \(ncace.ac.uk\)](https://www.ncace.ac.uk)

[Public Engagement Resources - National Centre for Co-ordinating Public Engagement \(publicengagement.ac.uk\)](https://www.ncace.ac.uk)

[What works guide - artists and researcher collaborations \(publicengagement.ac.uk\)](https://www.ncace.ac.uk)

[Co-Production in Research - UKRI \(ukri.org\)](https://www.ukri.org)

[Public Engagement - AHRC \(ukri.org\)](https://www.ukri.org)

[NCACE Micro Commissions Report](https://www.ncace.ac.uk)

For more cultural and knowledge exchange resources, explore our **[NCACE Evidence Repository](https://www.ncace.ac.uk)**.