

# Small and specialist arts institutions and the Knowledge Exchange Framework

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# Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Executive Summary</b>  | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>1. Introduction</b>  | <b>8</b>  |
| 1.2 The KEF   | 8         |
| 1.2 Objectives of the report  | 10        |
| <b>2. Trends in the knowledge exchange performance of small and specialist arts institutions: evidence from the first three KEF exercises</b> | <b>11</b> |
| 2.1 Population and indicators   | 11        |
| 2.2 The KE performance of the ARTS cluster compared with that of the other KEF clusters   | 13        |
| 2.3 The KE performance of the ARTS cluster over time  | 17        |
| 2.4 Conclusion  | 20        |
| <b>3. Cluster ARTS: HEIF funding context and the KEF3 narratives</b>  | <b>21</b> |
| 3.1 Funding Context   | 21        |
| 3.2 Common Narrative Themes   | 25        |
| 3.3 Emphasis on public cultural engagement  | 28        |
| 3.4 Conclusion  | 28        |
| <b>4. The KEF as a policy instrument to support KE: views from the sector</b>   | <b>29</b> |
| 4.1 The role of the KEF in the policy landscape   | 29        |
| 4.2 The value of the KEF for HEIs   | 32        |
| 4.3 Advantages and drawbacks of KEF metrics and narratives  | 33        |
| 4.4 Advantages and drawbacks of KEF metrics and narratives  | 36        |
| 4.5 Conclusion  | 37        |
| <b>5. The benefits and shortcomings of KEF for small specialist institutions: a narrative approach</b>  | <b>39</b> |
| 5.1 The official story  | 39        |
| 5.2 The untold story  | 40        |
| 5.3 The emerging story  | 41        |
| 5.4 The Future story  | 41        |
| 5.5 Conclusion  | 42        |
| Appendix A  | 43        |

# Executive summary

## Background

This report on Small Specialist Arts Institutions (SSIs) and KEF has emerged from an intense period of activities and conversations at [NCACE](#) that have broadly been concerned with the need for greater recognition of and support for the diverse types of knowledge exchange being enacted by small arts institutions across the country.

A series of conversations during 2023 with Dr Michelle Phillips, Royal Northern College of Music and her subsequent blog on [knowledge exchange and music conservatoires](#) contributed to setting the scene for this work. So too did our earlier work during 2022, in particular our KIN event which brought about this blog on [measuring the value of cultural knowledge exchange work](#) by Suzie Leighton, NCACE, Dr Astrid Breel, Bath Spa University and Sian Brittain, Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

Our desire to hear from the wider Knowledge Exchange community as well as from Small Specialists themselves led to us developing a recent Evidence Cafe<sup>1</sup> (May 24) on Knowledge Exchange and Small Specialist Arts where, as well as presenting our early research findings on this work, we also opened up a wider discussion to draw upon the experiences and perspectives from KE practitioners and to explore key questions around the ways in which KE is approached, supported, developed and valued within conservatoires and art schools. The event was attended by over 80 people, many of whom work in the small specialist sector.

These activities, as well as many helpful conversations with our colleagues at Research England, have contributed significantly to this report which aims to explore the specific issues that arise in relation to small and specialist arts institutions' engagement with KEF: the value that this exercise has for these HEIs, but also the specific problems that it poses, and the possible avenues that could be explored to make it more effective.

Relying on a varied evidence base which includes several sources (Knowledge Exchange Framework metrics relating to the period 2021-23, Knowledge Exchange Framework narratives relating to 2023, qualitative interviews with representatives of small specialist arts institutions, data available from Research England), our exploratory analysis has returned a number of interesting insights, which are summarised below.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://soundcloud.com/user-245837210/ncace-evidence-cafe-13-knowledge-exchange-and-small-specialist-arts-9-may-2024>

## **Evidence from KEF metrics: ARTS cluster is different from the others**

KEF metrics show that the ARTS cluster is quite different from the other clusters in terms of average values of the comparable indicators. In particular, the performance of the ARTS cluster is above that of the other clusters in all the skills, enterprise and entrepreneurship indicators and in the ‘working with business’ indicators that measure engagement in consultancy work. The performance of the ARTS cluster in the other two types of ‘working with business’ indicators is not very strong – ARTS HEIs do not appear to receive a lot of InnovateUK grants nor to do a lot of research contracts. Instead, the performance of the ARTS cluster is particularly below that of the other clusters in all indicators of research-based knowledge exchange (IP and commercialisation, co-authorships with non-academic partners).

Over time, we can see a process of alignment of the ARTS cluster with the other clusters.

The HEIs in the ARTS cluster have expanded, on average, the number of activities for which they report some degree of engagement. There seems to be a trend towards greater homogenization of HEIs’ profiles of engagement, which are becoming more similar to each other. Despite this trend towards greater similarity, HEIs remain very distinct in their own approach to KE engagement.

## **Evidence from KEF narratives: small specialist arts institutions display high levels of engagement with their sectors, local communities and the public**

Institutions in the ARTS cluster tend to receive low amounts of HEIF funding, when they receive it at all – out of 14 institutions, five institutions haven’t been allocated HEIF to carry out knowledge exchange activities in the period 2022-23. The total funding for KE and impact allocated to all institutions in the ARTS Cluster, which equates to that allocated to one member of Cluster V, could in fact be considered minor.

The KEF narratives show that small specialist arts institutions are very well networked, both locally, nationally and internationally, across sectoral, industrial, regional and educational networks. Collaborative relationships with local cultural or artistic organisations were also high, with one university reporting engagement with 64 local organisations. The levels of engagement with local arts or cultural organisations was impressive for particular HEIs, representing a huge range of cultural activity.

All SSIs under consideration contribute to the health and longevity of their sectors through providing trained graduates for employment within them. We also noted a huge number of public events provided by the conservatoires and performing arts colleges; and a high number of KE initiatives involving the public, such as coaching programmes and short courses - many of which were aimed at young people.

Many Small Specialist Arts Institutions are deeply embedded within their local communities as cornerstone organisations supporting not only the cultural life of their regions and beyond, but also as key contributors to improving social inclusion and local economies. Knowledge Exchange of this type cannot be easily recorded or recognised through KEF metrics, as they may be based upon academics sitting on advisory boards, offering networking opportunities or strategic advice.

## Evidence from interviews: KEF is valuable, but not in the ways that were originally envisaged

KEF sits quite uneasily among the range of policy tools in support of KE. Interviewees are unclear about what the role of this instrument is, and what are the stakeholders that are supposed to benefit from it. Numerous interviewees remark on the lack of clarity about who is the designed audience for the KEF: while originally the KEF was envisaged as an exercise of information collection and sharing that would help businesses to engage with HEIs by making it easier to gather information about potential partners in collaborations, over time it has become apparent that it is not a useful tool for industry.

The KEF has also not been picked up by the media, unlike the outcomes of the REF and TEF, and it is not clear what use the narratives have for funders and for other universities.

Yet, the KEF is a valuable exercise for HEIs.

1. It has encouraged universities to think more strategically about KE, by providing an opportunity to discuss the HEI's KE engagement from an organisation-wide perspective. It has also encouraged some HEIs to develop specific KE strategies which were previously missing.
2. The visibility of HEIs' KE activities has increased. This has made various stakeholders, internal and external, such as governors, external partners and the wider sector, more aware of the importance of KE. The culture of the organisation has changed, not only with KE being given greater importance, but also with some more subtle cultural changes like people starting to attribute financial value to collaborations. These cultural changes have led to some substantial changes, such as the introduction of academic career progression patterns based on success in KE and not only in teaching and/or research.
3. Since KE is more important for the institutions, it has also encouraged HEIs, particularly small specialists, to work together to advocate for their interests with government in relation to KE.
4. Finally, the KEF has helped HEIs become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses in KE.

There is consensus that the metrics collected by the KEF miss some key outcomes that are very important for small and specialist arts institutions, such as:

- Outcomes that can be measured in monetary terms, but they are not captured in the KEF's metrics – for example, investment received by the university, or investments attracted in the region as a consequence of the HEI's KE activities
- Outcomes that do not have clear financial metrics for them, such the HEI's 'soft power' in the region
- Outcomes for which, although they have a financial metric, the income is not accrued or recorded by the university
- Outcomes which are very valuable to the university (for example, the ability to place graduates in relevant professional roles) although they do not bring in income
- Outcomes which are not included in the funding formula.

The problems with metrics are too great for the KEF to be an effective performance measurement tool, and the effort to collect good metrics might outweigh any advantage of better measurement. Instead, the KEF seems to work best as a best practice and benchmarking exercise, primarily aimed at HEIs themselves and perhaps at funding bodies.

The method used to revise the KEF needs to be updated and become more inclusive and less incremental.

### **Evidence from interviews: KEF could be a source of important stories and inspiration about the value of knowledge exchange**

There is widespread agreement among collaborators and stakeholders that knowledge exchange is a source of rich, often overlapping stories. In this way, the articulation of the value of knowledge exchange clearly requires a narrative approach. There is also the suggestion, however, that systems such as KEF reduce those stories to their financial bare bones by conflating impact with income.

One of key areas in which financial value was said to be overlooked is in the complementary relationship between the arts and STEM subjects. This included (but was not limited to) the value of the arts in communicating scientific research to the public. But at the same time, we must also take into account social value, which is to say, aspects of knowledge exchange that are geared towards the betterment of local and global communities (as opposed to profit).

At present, the array of narratives and stories that emerge through knowledge exchange projects remain undeveloped within KEF. By basing its metrics around income into the university, KEF fails to capture non-financial values (social, health, ecological etc.), as well overlooking financial value that is more indirect and longitudinal. What is more, while the KEF narrative statements provide an outlet for this hidden data, their limited readership suggests a lesser significance compared to REF and TEF. There is also a tension between the steps that would need to be taken to make the narratives richer and more visible and the extra burden that this would create for universities – particularly small specialist institutions.

And yet, for all of the knowledge exchange activities that these institutions have been a part of, the absence of an official platform from which to narrate and celebrate these activities risks painting an inaccurate picture that could affect funding and public perception. Connected to this risk, there is also a feeling that the individuals and relationships that are the very lifeblood of knowledge exchange are relegated to the margins. Some deeper exploration of the potential to harness the narratives of the cultural, health, social and environmental benefits of the knowledge exchange catalysed by the small specialists would clearly be very beneficial, as would the opportunity to create mechanisms to better understand and reward the cross-disciplinary impacts they support.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the people who have so generously contributed their time and expertise to the development of this report, in particular our interviewees: Dr Michelle Phillips (Royal Northern Conservatoire of Music), Sian Brittain and Jo Chard (Guildhall School of Music and Drama), Tatiana Schofield (Royal College of Art), Alisdair Aldous (University of the Arts), Daniel Cox (Arts University Bournemouth), Louis Nixon and Sarah Steed (Norwich University of the Arts).

**Dr Federica Rossi (Co-I, NCACE) and Evelyn Wilson (Co-Director, NCACE)**

# 1. Introduction

## 1.2 The KEF

The [Knowledge Exchange Framework \(KEF\)](#) was introduced in 2020 by Research England as an exercise aimed at providing a range of information on the knowledge exchange (KE) activities of higher education institutions (HEIs) in England. The KEF aims to “allow providers of higher education to better understand and improve their own performance in knowledge exchange, as well as provide more information about the world-class knowledge and expertise within English providers of higher education”.

The exercise is held annually, with the first exercise having been carried out in 2021. The KEF has two main components: a database containing several variables measuring HEI’s KE activities, from which information can be extracted and displayed using several types of visual tools; a set of narrative statements, written descriptions provided by HEIs to describe and contextualise their KE activities. The narrative statements have a word limit and a template, which asks HEIs to highlight three main areas of engagement: institutional context, local growth and regeneration activities, and public and community engagement activities.

All the KEF information is publicly available from the [KEF website](#). To facilitate comparison and benchmarking across HEIs that are broadly similar, HEIs are categorized into seven clusters, listed in the table overleaf.

From the perspective of small specialist arts institutions, the KEF has been criticized mainly because the view of HEIs’ KE activities that can be gleaned through the narrow set of metrics collected through this exercise, is only partial and misleading. Many of these metrics are argued to be inadequate to capture what arts institutions actually do and their effective engagement with stakeholders in business and broader society (Phillips, 2024).<sup>2</sup> At the same time, while the narrative offer the opportunity to expand on this view, they time consuming to read and they have also be argued to be insufficient to represent the rich patterns of relationships that arts institutions entertain with external organisations.

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<sup>2</sup> Phillips, M. (2024) Entrepreneurship and knowledge exchange in a music conservatoire – it’s our bread and butter!, February 2024.



Table 1.1 **The KEF clusters**

| Cluster     | Summary of Characteristics  | Institution Members Examples   |
|-------------|---|--|
| <b>ARTS</b> | Specialist institutions covering arts, music and drama (as defined by a very high concentration of academic staff in these disciplines). A range of sizes of institutions, although many are relatively small and specialist.   | Guildhall School of Music and Drama,<br>Royal Northern College of Music,<br>The Arts University Bournemouth,<br>University for the Creative Arts                                   |
| <b>E</b>    | Large universities with broad discipline portfolio across both STEM and non-STEM generating excellent research across all disciplines. Significant amount of research funded by government bodies/hospitals; 9.5% from industry. Large proportion of part-time undergraduate students. Small postgraduate population dominated by taught postgraduates.                               | Coventry University,<br>Liverpool John Moores University,<br>Oxford Brookes University,<br>Manchester Metropolitan University,<br>University of Northumbria,<br>Goldsmiths College |
| <b>J</b>    | Mid-sized universities with more of a teaching focus (although research is still in evidence). Academic activity across STEM and non-STEM disciplines including other health, computer sciences, architecture and planning, social sciences and business, humanities, arts and design. Research activity funded largely by government bodies/ hospitals; 13.7% from industry.         | Birmingham City University,<br>University of Sunderland,<br>Staffordshire University,<br>The University of East London,<br>Roehampton University                                   |
| <b>M</b>    | Smaller universities, often with a teaching focus. Academic activity across disciplines, particularly in other health domains and non-STEM. More research activity funded by government bodies/hospitals; 14.7% from industry.  | Bath Spa University,<br>The University of West London,<br>The University of Winchester,<br>University of Suffolk,<br>York St John University                                       |
| <b>STEM</b> | Specialist institutions covering science, technology, engineering and mathematics (as defined by a very high concentration of academic staff in these disciplines). Often high amounts of excellent research, particularly in bioscience & veterinary and engineering.  | London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine,<br>Royal Agricultural University,<br>The Royal Veterinary College,<br>Harper Adams University                                      |
| <b>V</b>    | Very large, very high research intensive and broad-discipline universities undertaking significant amounts of excellent research. Research funded by range of sources including UKRI, other government bodies and charities; 10.2% from industry. Significant activity in clinical medicine and STEM. Student body includes significant numbers of taught and research postgraduates. | King's College London,<br>Newcastle University,<br>The University of Birmingham,<br>The University of Manchester,<br>The University of Southampton,<br>The University of Oxford    |
| <b>X</b>    | Large, high research intensive and broad-discipline universities undertaking a significant amount of excellent research. Much of research funded by UKRI and other government bodies; 8.5% from industry. Discipline portfolio balanced across STEM and non-STEM although less clinical medicine activity. Large proportion of taught postgraduates in student population             | Birkbeck College, Keele University,<br>The University of East Anglia,<br>The University of Leicester,<br>The University of Sussex,<br>University of Durham                         |

## 1.2 Objectives of the report

The present report aims to explore the specific issues that arise in relation to small and specialist arts institutions' engagement with KEF: the value that this exercise has for these HEIs, but also the specific problems that it poses, and the possible avenues that could be explored to make it more effective. The analysis relies on three separate sources of evidence:

- First, in order to highlight the specificities of small specialist arts institutions when it comes to KE, we performed a comparative longitudinal analysis of the KE performance of the HEIs that are part of the ARTS cluster, comparing it with the performance of HEIs in the other KEF clusters, using the metrics collected in the first KEF exercises (2021-2023). This analysis is presented in section 2, “The KE performance of ARTS cluster HEIs over time (2021-2023) using KEF data”.
- Second, in order to derive further insight into the characteristics of KE activities of HEIs that are part of the ARTS cluster, we read and analysed the narrative statements submitted by the 14 institutions that are part of this cluster. This analysis is presented in section 3, “Small specialist institutions' KE profiles as emerging from the KEF narratives”.
- Third, in order to better understand what is the value of KEF for small specialist arts institutions, and what are the main challenges that they are faced with when using this instrument, we carried out six interviews with eight people involved in the management of KE activities at six HEIs that are part of the ARTS cluster. This analysis is presented in section 4, “The KEF as a policy instrument to support KE: views from the sector”, and section 5 “The benefits and shortcomings of KEF for small specialist institutions: a narrative approach” .

## 2. Trends in the knowledge exchange performance of small and specialist arts institutions: evidence from the first three KEF exercises

**Dr Federica Rossi**

The KE metrics included in the KEF allow us to compare the performance of individual or groups of HEIs against each other, albeit for a small set of variables which only capture some part of HEIs' KE activities. One of the main reasons for which the KEF was set up is indeed to facilitate this benchmarking activity, allowing comparisons between the performance of one HEI against that of other HEIs in its cluster, as well as the performance of clusters against each other. Thanks to the fact that three editions of the KEF have already been completed and that the relative data have been made public (2021, 2022, 2023), it is now also possible to analyse the performance of individual and groups of HEIs over time. The performance of the ARTS cluster in KEF has been analysed before (see e.g. Zhou and Baines, 2023)<sup>3</sup> but we are not aware of previous longitudinal analyses that considered how the performance of the ARTS cluster has changed over time.

In this chapter, we showcase the results of a descriptive analysis comparing the performance of the HEIs in the ARTS cluster to that of HEIs in the other KEF clusters, in relation to the KEF indicators for which comparable data is available over the three periods – corresponding to KEF 2021, 2022 and 2023. In order to perform these comparisons, we need to identify a stable population of HEIs and a set of variables that are comparable over time.

### 2.1 Population and indicators

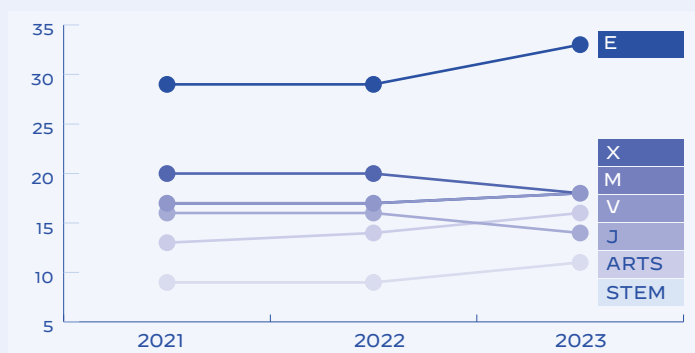
In terms of population, HEIs have remained within their clusters throughout the three periods. However, some clusters have increased in size as there have been new HEIs entering the KEF over time. The first KEF in 2021 included 121 institutions, KEF 2022 included 122, and KEF 2023 included 128 institutions. The following figure shows the number of HEIs in each cluster over time. Most clusters slightly increased their membership apart from J and X. Our analysis focuses on the 121 HEIs which were included in all three KEF exercises – we exclude the 7 HEIs which only appeared in one or two KEF exercises.

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<sup>3</sup> Zhou, R., Baines, N. To what extent do universities' formal and informal knowledge exchange activities interact: evidence from UK HE-BCI survey. *J Technol Transf* (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10961-023-10051-9>

Figure 2.1 **Number of HEI in each cluster, over time**

|       | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|-------|------|------|------|
| ARTS  | 13   | 14   | 16   |
| E     | 29   | 29   | 33   |
| J     | 16   | 16   | 14   |
| M     | 17   | 17   | 18   |
| STEM  | 9    | 9    | 11   |
| V     | 17   | 17   | 18   |
| X     | 20   | 20   | 18   |
| Total | 121  | 122  | 128  |



In terms of variables, comparable data across the three periods are available for the following indicators (grouped into the same categories as proposed by the KEF website).

Table 2.1 **Indicators used for comparative analysis**

|  |
|--|
| <b>IP and commercialisation</b>  |
| Licensing and other IP income as a proportion of research income                                   |
| <b>Research partnerships</b>   |
| Co-authorship with non-academic partners as a proportion of total outputs                          |
| <b>Local growth and regeneration</b>   |
| Income from all sources normalised by HEI income   |
| <b>Skills, enterprise and entrepreneurship</b>   |
| HE-BCI CPD/CE income normalised by HEI income  |
| HE-BCI graduate start-ups by student FTE   |
| <b>Working with business</b>   |
| Innovate UK income as a proportion of research income  |
| HE-BCI consultancy and facilities income with non-SME business normalised by HEI income            |
| HE-BCI consultancy and facilities income with SME business normalised by HEI income                |
| HE-BCI contract research income with non-SME business normalised by HEI income                     |
| HE-BCI contract research income with SME business normalised by HEI income                         |
| HE-BCI consultancy and facilities income with the public and third sector normalised by HEI income |
| HE-BCI contract research income with the public and third sector normalised by HEI income          |
| <b>Public and community engagement</b>   |
| Assessment based metric – optional in year 1   |

Some indicators are not comparable because their definition has changed over time.<sup>4</sup> We also do not consider one indicator which is difficult to interpret due to the presence of large outliers.<sup>5</sup> For all the indicators, the data we extract refer to 3 Year Metric Averages (averages of the previous three years of data).

4 In particular:

‘Average external investment per formal spinout’ was changed to ‘Average external investment per spinouts surviving 3 years’ in KEF 2022 and then back to ‘Average external investment per formal spinout’ in KEF 2023  
 ‘Estimated current turnover of all active firms per active spinout’ was changed to ‘Estimated current turnover of all active firms per spinouts surviving 3 years’ in KEF 2022 and KEF 2023  
 ‘HE-BCI CPD-CE learner days delivered normalised by HEI income’ was not collected in KEF 2022 and KEF 2023.

5 This is the indicator “Contribution to collaborative research (cash) as a proportion of public funding”.

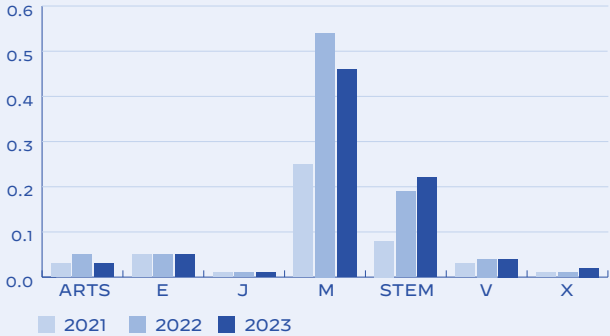
## 2.2 The KE performance of the ARTS cluster compared with that of the other KEF clusters

In order to illustrate the specificities of the ARTS cluster HEIs when compared with other HEIs, we analyse the values of the available indicators for the seven clusters separately. It is apparent that the ARTS cluster is quite different from the other clusters in terms of average values of the comparable indicators: in some cases it displays values that are lower than those of the other clusters, in other cases it displays values that are much higher. It is infrequent for the ARTS cluster to find itself in the middle of the range, showing that these HEIs tend to have a different profile when it comes to KE. While this is something that we already know from previous analyses, the original aspect of our analysis is that we are considering the trends over time.

When it comes to IP and commercialisation, which capture the KE activities that are more directly linked to the production of research outputs (figure 2.2), the ARTS cluster has one of the lowest averages in terms of Licensing and other IP income as a proportion of research income, only above the X and J clusters and similar to the V cluster. Additionally, the value of the indicator, after increasing slightly in KEF 2022, decreased in KEF 2023. The best performing clusters are the M and STEM clusters.

**Figure 2.2 Licensing and other IP income as a proportion of research income, by KEF cluster (%)**

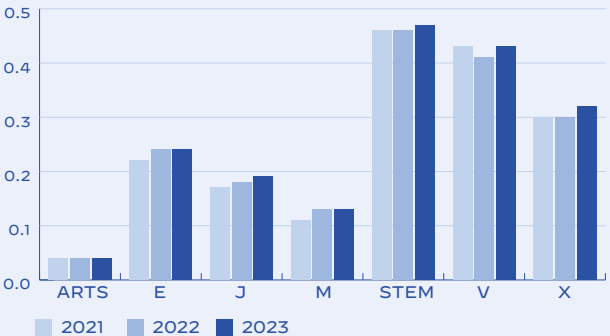
|         | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------|------|------|------|
| ARTS    | 0.03 | 0.05 | 0.03 |
| E       | 0.05 | 0.05 | 0.05 |
| J       | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| M       | 0.25 | 0.54 | 0.46 |
| STEM    | 0.08 | 0.19 | 0.22 |
| V       | 0.03 | 0.04 | 0.04 |
| X       | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.02 |
| Overall | 0.06 | 0.12 | 0.10 |



The indicator “Co-authorship with non-academic partners as a proportion of total outputs” is a measure of the engagement in research partnerships. For this indicator, the trends are stable for all clusters, including the ARTS cluster, which displays consistently the lowest average of all clusters (Figure 2.3). It is clear that in the ARTS clusters co-publishing with non-academic partners is not very frequent. The STEM and V clusters have the highest values of this indicator.

**Figure 2.3 Co-authorship with non-academic partners as a proportion of total outputs, by KEF cluster (%)**

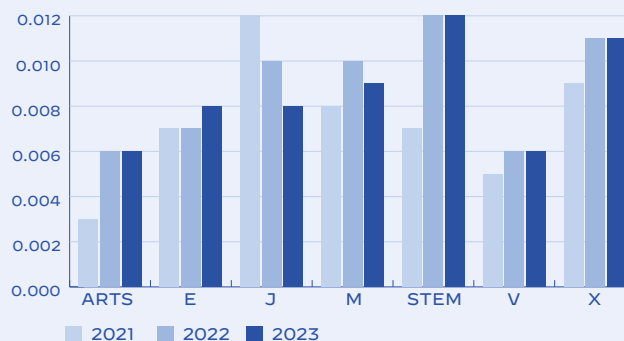
|         | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------|------|------|------|
| ARTS    | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.04 |
| E       | 0.22 | 0.24 | 0.24 |
| J       | 0.17 | 0.18 | 0.19 |
| M       | 0.11 | 0.13 | 0.13 |
| STEM    | 0.46 | 0.46 | 0.47 |
| V       | 0.43 | 0.41 | 0.43 |
| X       | 0.30 | 0.30 | 0.32 |
| Overall | 0.24 | 0.25 | 0.26 |



In terms of Local growth and regeneration, the ARTS cluster displayed an increasing trend for the indicator Regeneration and development income from all sources normalised by HEI income (Figure 2.4). Starting from a low base (the lowest of all clusters) in 2021, it improved its performance: although it maintains the lowest average value, the distance with the other clusters has reduced

**Figure 2.4 Regeneration and development income from all sources normalised by HEI income, by KEF cluster (%)**

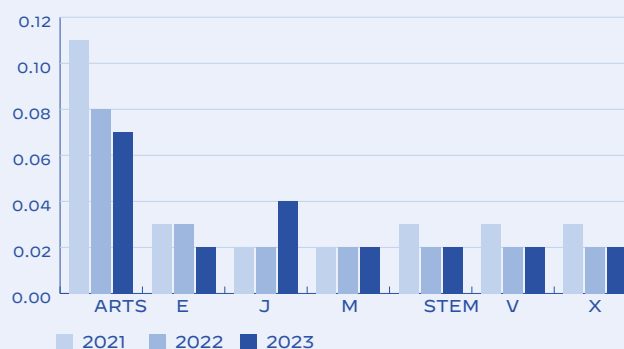
|         | 2021  | 2022  | 2023  |
|---------|-------|-------|-------|
| ARTS    | 0.003 | 0.006 | 0.006 |
| E       | 0.007 | 0.007 | 0.008 |
| J       | 0.012 | 0.010 | 0.008 |
| M       | 0.008 | 0.010 | 0.009 |
| STEM    | 0.007 | 0.012 | 0.012 |
| V       | 0.005 | 0.006 | 0.006 |
| X       | 0.009 | 0.011 | 0.011 |
| Overall | 0.007 | 0.009 | 0.008 |



Skills, enterprise and entrepreneurship indicators include HE-BCI CPD/CE income normalised by HEI income and HE-BCI graduate start-ups by student FTE. The HE-BCI CPD/CE income normalised by HEI income indicator (Figure 2.5) shows that the ARTS cluster has the highest value compared to all the other clusters, and remains at the top over time despite a decreasing trend (except for cluster J, all other clusters have also had a decreasing trend, although the decrease was less steep than for the ARTS cluster). It is noticeable how the averages of the other clusters are quite similar to each other, while for the ARTS cluster the average is much higher.

**Figure 2.5 HE-BCI CPD/CE income normalised by HEI income, by KEF cluster (%)**

|         | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------|------|------|------|
| ARTS    | 0.11 | 0.08 | 0.07 |
| E       | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.02 |
| J       | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.04 |
| M       | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.02 |
| STEM    | 0.03 | 0.02 | 0.02 |
| V       | 0.03 | 0.02 | 0.02 |
| X       | 0.03 | 0.02 | 0.02 |
| Overall | 0.04 | 0.03 | 0.03 |



In terms of HE-BCI graduate start-ups by student FTE (Figure 2.6), we find a similar pattern in that the ARTS cluster has the highest value of this indicator, which remains the highest over time despite a steep decreasing trend. All other clusters have similar lower values, which are stable over time.

Figure 2.6 HE-BCI graduate start-ups by student FTE, by KEF cluster (%)

|         | 2021   | 2022   | 2023   |
|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| ARTS    | 0.0374 | 0.0190 | 0.0156 |
| E       | 0.0028 | 0.0027 | 0.0025 |
| J       | 0.0016 | 0.0018 | 0.0019 |
| M       | 0.0037 | 0.0033 | 0.0035 |
| STEM    | 0.0010 | 0.0009 | 0.0005 |
| V       | 0.0022 | 0.0015 | 0.0012 |
| X       | 0.0005 | 0.0008 | 0.0011 |
| Overall | 0.0059 | 0.0038 | 0.0034 |



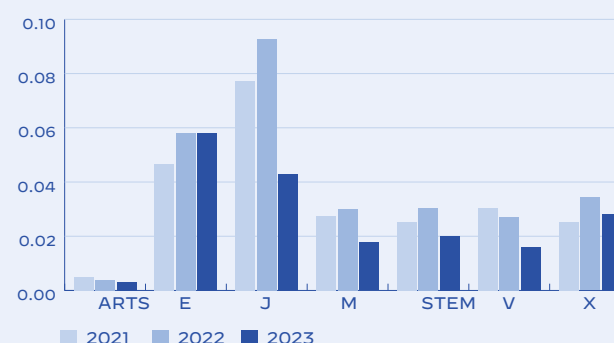
Working with business indicators include: Innovate UK income as a proportion of research income; three indicators measuring HE-BCI consultancy and facilities income normalised by HEI income (considering: non-SME business, SME business, public and third sector) and three indicators measuring contract research income normalised by HEI income (considering: non-SME business, SME business, public and third sector).

Since these indicators have the same denominator they can be summed over, so we consider the total consultancy and facilities income normalised by HEI income, and the total contract research income normalised by HEI income.

When it comes to Innovate UK income as a proportion of research income (Figure 2.7), the ARTS cluster has the lowest value of the indicator, and this occurs consistently over time. The top cluster here was initially cluster J but its value dropped in 2023 leading to E being the top cluster in 2023. It seems that ARTS cluster HEIs do not receive almost any grants from InnovateUK, perhaps due to these grants not being particularly suited to their research and collaboration activities or to these grants being targeted to subject areas the ARTS HEIs are not active in.

Figure 2.7 Innovate UK income as a proportion of research income, by KEF cluster (%)

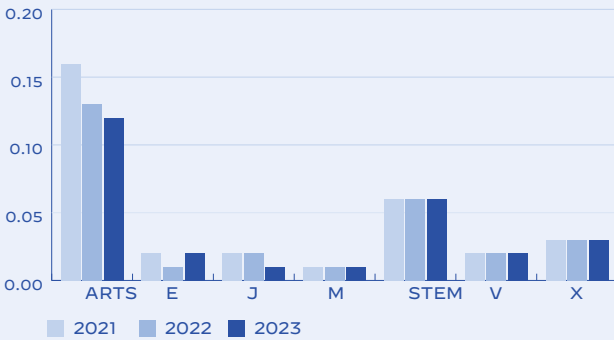
|         | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------|------|------|------|
| ARTS    | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| E       | 0.05 | 0.06 | 0.06 |
| J       | 0.08 | 0.09 | 0.04 |
| M       | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.02 |
| STEM    | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.02 |
| V       | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.02 |
| X       | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.03 |
| Overall | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.03 |



The Total consultancy and facilities income normalised by HEI income indicator (Figure 2.8) shows that the ARTS cluster performs better than all other clusters, despite a decreasing trend of this indicator.

**Figure 2.8 Total consultancy and facilities income normalised by HEI income, by KEF cluster (%)**

|         | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------|------|------|------|
| ARTS    | 0.16 | 0.13 | 0.12 |
| E       | 0.02 | 0.01 | 0.02 |
| J       | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.01 |
| M       | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| STEM    | 0.06 | 0.06 | 0.06 |
| V       | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.02 |
| X       | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.03 |
| Overall | 0.04 | 0.03 | 0.03 |

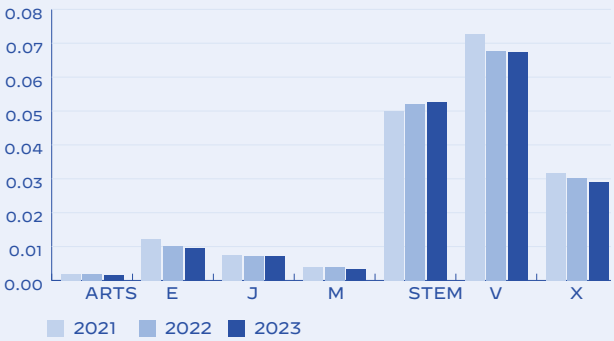


When we consider the components of this indicator (non-SME business, SME business, public and third sector), we find that the ARTS cluster is by far top of the bunch in terms of income with non-SME business and income with SME business in all three periods, despite a decreasing trend. However, it is not at the top in terms of income with the public and third sector, where instead the top performer is the STEM cluster (and the ARTS cluster comes second, although the STEM cluster had a decrease in 2023, and in the last year the values of the STEM and ARTS clusters were basically equal).

In terms of Total contract research income normalised by HEI income (Figure 2.9), on the contrary the ARTS cluster is at the bottom of the bunch, with a stable trend. The top performers are the V, STEM and X clusters.

**Figure 2.9 Total contract research income normalised by HEI income, by KEF cluster (%)**

|         | 2021   | 2022   | 2023   |
|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| ARTS    | 0.0020 | 0.0018 | 0.0015 |
| E       | 0.0121 | 0.0103 | 0.0095 |
| J       | 0.0076 | 0.0073 | 0.0072 |
| M       | 0.0041 | 0.0039 | 0.0035 |
| STEM    | 0.0499 | 0.0520 | 0.0527 |
| V       | 0.0727 | 0.0676 | 0.0673 |
| X       | 0.0317 | 0.0301 | 0.0291 |
| Overall | 0.02   | 0.02   | 0.02   |



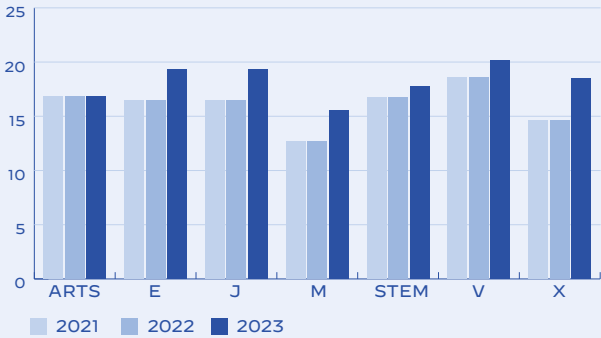
When we consider the components of this indicator (non-SME business, SME business, public and third sector), we find that the ARTS cluster performs at the bottom for all three components.

Considering public engagement (figure 2.10), this is one of the few metrics where the ARTS cluster performs in the middle of the other clusters. It is notable that the trend for several clusters (V, J, E, X, M) is similar (stable from 2021 and 2022, increasing in 2023), while the other clusters have a stable trend (STEM, ARTS). Given that the ARTS average has remained stable while most others have increased, in 2023 ARTS is below clusters J and X (which were below ARTS in 2021-22). However, this is a self-assessed metric and it is difficult to draw conclusions.



Figure 2.10 Public engagement self-assessment based metric, by KEF cluster (%)

|         | 2021  | 2022  | 2023  |
|---------|-------|-------|-------|
| ARTS    | 16.85 | 16.85 | 16.85 |
| E       | 16.48 | 16.48 | 19.29 |
| J       | 16.50 | 16.50 | 19.29 |
| M       | 12.71 | 12.71 | 15.56 |
| STEM    | 16.78 | 16.78 | 17.72 |
| V       | 18.59 | 18.59 | 20.19 |
| X       | 14.65 | 14.65 | 18.50 |
| Overall | 16.01 | 16.01 | 18.43 |

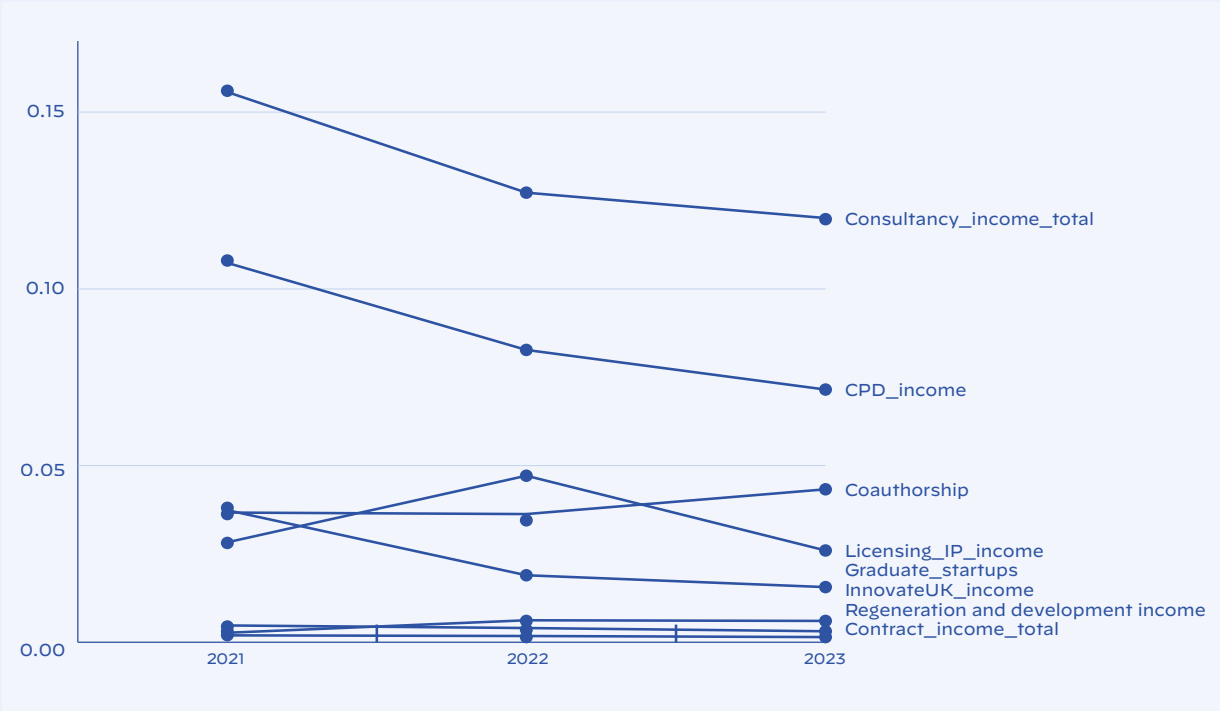


### 2.3 The KE performance of the ARTS cluster over time

We consider the performance of ARTS cluster HEIs over time. Considering all of the indicators for the ARTS cluster HEIs together, (Figure 2.11), we can see that the indicators either decreased or remained stable, and, overall, they tended to become closer to each other. This seems to suggest that the HEIs in this cluster are moving towards a more balanced combination of knowledge exchange activities.

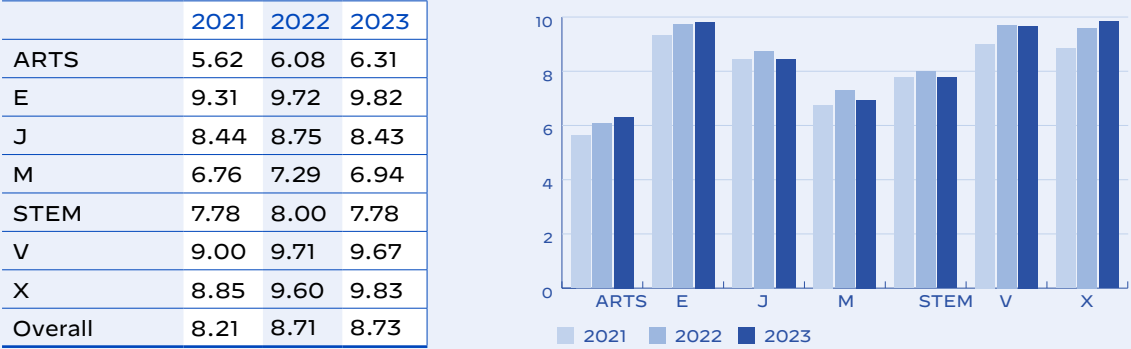
Figure 2.11 All indicators, average for ARTS cluster HEIs

|                                     | 2021   | 2022   | 2023   |
|-------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Licensing_IP_income                 | 0.028  | 0.047  | 0.026  |
| Coauthorship                        | 0.037  | 0.036  | 0.043  |
| InnovateUK_income                   | 0.005  | 0.004  | 0.003  |
| Regeneration and development income | 0.003  | 0.006  | 0.006  |
| Consultancy_income_total            | 0.156  | 0.127  | 0.12   |
| Contract_income_total               | 0.002  | 0.002  | 0.001  |
| CPD_income                          | 0.107  | 0.083  | 0.072  |
| Graduate_startups                   | 0.037  | 0.019  | 0.016  |
| Public engagement Self_assessment   | 16.846 | 16.846 | 16.846 |



Considering the number of different activities reported (that is, the number of different indicators for which the value is greater than zero), we can (Figure 2.12) that the HEIs in the ARTS cluster are the ones which report, on average, the lowest number of different activities, meaning that their activity is more focused on certain channels of KE and not others. This number however has been steadily increasing. We consider 10 different activities (summing over all consultancy types into one and all research contract types into one).

**Figure 2.12 Number of different activities reported on average, by KEF cluster**



These indicators together point to a slight movement in the direction of the expansion of the activities of the ARTS cluster HEIs which lead to a slightly more balanced composition of their portfolio of KE activities.

The next step is to look in more detail at the HEIs which are part of the ARTS cluster.

When we consider the number of different KE activities that each HEI in the ARTS cluster is involved in (taking into account 10 different activities, that is, summing over all consultancy types into one and all research contract types into one) (Figure 2.13) we find a notable heterogeneity across these HEIs. A couple of HEIs report values greater than zero for all or almost all activities, three report values greater than zero for four or less activities, and the other ones are in between. The number of activities reported is stable for 5 HEIs, decreasing for 2 HEIs, and increasing for 5 HEIs (one of these, Arts Universities Plymouth, reports a strong increase in the number of activities).

**Figure 2.13 Number of different activities reported by each HEI in the KEF cluster**

|  | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|--|------|------|------|
| University of the Arts, London                 | 10   | 10   | 10   |
| Royal College of Art                           | 10   | 9    | 9    |
| Norwich University of the Arts                 | 6    | 6    | 7    |
| The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama   | 6    | 7    | 7    |
| Royal Northern College of Music                | 6    | 8    | 8    |
| Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance | 6    | 6    | 5    |
| The Arts University Bournemouth                | 5    | 6    | 6    |
| The National Film and Television School        | 5    | 5    | 5    |
| Royal College of Music                         | 5    | 7    | 7    |
| Guildhall School of Music and Drama            | 5    | 5    | 5    |
| LAMDA Limited                                  | 4    | 4    | 4    |
| Arts University Plymouth                       | 3    | 4    | 7    |
| Royal Academy of Dramatic Art                  | 2    | 2    | 2    |

Finally, we have clustered the ARTS cluster HEIs using the indicators for 2023, to identify which HEIs have similar profiles of KE engagement. By applying a hierarchical clustering algorithm (Ward’s linkage, with Canberra distance measure) we find 4 clusters, as reported in the following table.

**Table 2.2 KE profiles of ARTS cluster HEIs**

| CLUSTERS                            | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4      | F (p-value) |
|-------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| Number of HEIs                      | 2      | 5      | 2      | 4      |             |
| Licensing_IP_income                 | 0.000  | 0.001  | 0.037  | 0.065  | 0.570       |
| Regeneration and development income | 0.020  | 0.005  | 0.001  | 0.003  | 0.001       |
| Public engagement Self_assessment   | 16.000 | 19.100 | 21.250 | 12.250 | 0.242       |
| Coauthorship                        | 0.000  | 0.079  | 0.084  | 0.000  | 0.005       |
| Collaborative                       | 0.714  | 0.006  | 2.016  | 0.000  | 0.117       |
| CPD_income                          | 0.009  | 0.024  | 0.019  | 0.188  | 0.246       |
| Graduate_startups                   | 0.011  | 0.016  | 0.050  | 0.001  | 0.113       |
| InnovateUK_income                   | 0.000  | 0.003  | 0.012  | 0.000  | 0.080       |
| Consultancy_income_total            | 0.003  | 0.010  | 0.008  | 0.372  | 0.163       |
| Contract_income_total               | 0.002  | 0.000  | 0.006  | 0.000  | 0.076       |

The first cluster includes two HEIs – The Arts University Bournemouth, Arts University Plymouth - which report relatively low engagement in most activities, except for Regeneration and development income and collaborative research. These HEIs have a profile of KE oriented to engagement with local actors.

The second cluster includes five HEIs - Norwich University of the Arts, Royal College of Music, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Royal Northern College of Music – which also report relatively low values of engagement across the board, except from co-authorships and public engagement (self assessed). These HEIs have a profile of KE based on research-led engagement.

The third cluster includes two HEIs - University of the Arts London, Royal College of Art which report higher degrees of engagement across the board and particularly in areas linked to research-based KE (IP income, co-authorships, collaborative research, InnovateUK income, contract research income) as well as graduate startups. These HEIs have a profile of KE based on the exploitation of research outcomes.

Finally the fourth cluster includes two HEIs – LAMDA Limited, The National Film and Television School – which engage in few activities but report relatively higher values of IP income, consultancy income and CPD income (and low values of public engagement). These HEIs have a profile of KE based on providing support to professionals and to industry.

## 2.4 Conclusion

The ARTS cluster performs differently from the other clusters in almost all indicators, where it takes values either above or under the other clusters. The self-assessed metric for public engagement is the only one where the ARTS cluster is in between the others.

The performance of the ARTS cluster is above that of the other clusters in all the skills, enterprise and entrepreneurship indicators (HE-BCI CPD/CE income and HE-BCI graduate start-ups by student FTE) and in the ‘working with business’ indicators that measure engagement in consultancy work (Consultancy and facilities income normalised by HEI income, in terms of overall consultancy income and also of income from consultancies with SME and non-SME businesses; the performance in terms of consultancies with the public and third sector was also very good, the ARTS being second after STEM).

The performance of the ARTS cluster in the other two types of ‘working with business’ indicators is not very strong – ARTS HEIs do not appear to receive a lot of InnovateUK grants nor to do a lot of research contracts.

Instead, the performance of the ARTS cluster is particularly below that of the other clusters in all indicators of research-based knowledge exchange (IP and commercialisation, co-authorships with non-academic partners).

Over time, we can see a process of alignment of the ARTS cluster with the other clusters. While remaining above or under the values of the other clusters, there has been:

a decrease in the performance of the ARTS cluster in those indicators where initially it had very high values (HE-BCI CPD/CE income normalised by HEI income, HE-BCI graduate start-ups by student FTE, Total consultancy and facilities income normalised by HEI income)

an increase in the performance of the ARTS cluster in those indicators where it initially had very low values (Regeneration and development income from all sources normalised by HEI income). As a result, the ARTS cluster was a bit closer to the other clusters in these indicators in 2023 than it was in the previous two periods.

The HEIs in the ARTS cluster have expanded, on average, the number of activities for which they report some degree of engagement. There seems to be a trend towards greater homogenization of HEIs’ profiles of engagement, which are becoming more similar to each other. Despite this trend towards greater similarity, HEIs remain very distinct in their own approach to KE engagement.

In order to delve further into individual ARTS cluster HEI’s approach to KE, we have analysed the KEF narratives submitted by these HEIs (Chapter 3).

# 3. Cluster ARTS: HEIF funding context and the KEF3 narratives

**Dr Laura Kemp and Dr Ning Baines**

Throughout this report, we have endeavoured to understand the breadth and nature of Knowledge Exchange taking place in small specialist institutions which submitted to the KEF3 ARTS Cluster. The narrative element of the KEF submission allows participating institutions to demonstrate their impact and initiatives for KE with more detail and context. Although it's widely acknowledged that the narratives do not attract wide readership, they do provide an opportunity for non-numerical and non-financial benefits of HEIs knowledge exchange activities to be recorded. They also provide more context, both regional and sectoral, to the HEIs' strategies and connectivity which can lead to a greater understanding of the impact they have both within their local cultural ecologies and their related industries. This is especially important for small, specialist arts institutions (SSIs). Initially, our methodology was to employ qualitative data analysis software to drill down into the narratives and bring out the total number of mentions for a range of categories in each document. However, the scope of organisations, local authorities, individuals, initiatives and networks was too wide for the coding to recognise. Therefore, we manually undertook close textual analysis of the fourteen narratives submitted to the ARTS Cluster and were able to draw several conclusions from the range of activities, partners, initiatives and networks described within them. In this chapter we showcase the results of this descriptive analysis.

## 3.1 Funding Context

Fourteen narratives were submitted by members of the ARTS Cluster to KEF3 and the names of these institutions can be found in Appendix A. Broadly, these institutions fall into two categories, although there are variations in size within each group;

1. Conservatoires or performing arts colleges which focus on supporting employment, growth and innovation in their related sectors, such as music, dance or theatre/drama.
2. Art Colleges which focus on supporting local practitioners and small businesses in related sectors.

We also explored the amount of HEIF funding received by institutions in the ARTS Cluster from 2022-23, using resources available from Research England. Table 3.1 captures the HEIF funding allocation to the 14 SSIs in question over the period of 3 years. Out of 14 institutions, five institutions haven't been allocated HEIF to carry out knowledge exchange activities.

**Table 3.1 HEIF Total Allocation in 2021/2022, 2022/23 and 20223/24 to Arts Specialists Institutions**

| Higher education provider                          | Knowledge exchange funding total allocation (£) 2021/2022 | HEIF total allocation (£) 2022/23 | HEIF total allocation (£) 2023/24 |
|--|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| The Arts University Bournemouth                    | -   | 270,148                           | 261,913                           |
| The Arts University Plymouth                       | -   | -                                 | -                                 |
| University of the Arts, London                     | 4,083,885   | 4,041,427                         | 3,637,284                         |
| Contemporary Dance Trust (The Place)               | -   | -                                 | -                                 |
| Guildhall School of Music & Drama                  | 594,115   | 600,164                           | 592,638                           |
| LAMDA  | 1,395,717   | 1,294,477                         | 1,283,249                         |
| The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA) | -   | -                                 | -                                 |
| The National Film and Television School            | -   | 286,004                           | 314,166                           |
| Norwich University of the Arts                     | -   | -                                 | -                                 |
| The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama       | -   | -                                 | -                                 |
| The Royal College of Art                           | 391,516   | 352,364                           | 317,128                           |
| Royal College of Music                             | 353,414   | 379,763                           | 361,210                           |
| Royal Northern College of Music                    | 361,587   | 325,428                           | 292,885                           |
| Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance     | 417,644   | 432,824                           | 406,012                           |

When compared with the funding allocation to institutions in Cluster V (characterised as very large, very high research intensive and broad-discipline) for 2022/23 as shown in Figure 3.1 and 3.2 respectively, generally the funding allocated to ARTS Cluster members is a fraction of the amounts allocated to members of Cluster V. There is one exception to this rule, which is University of the Arts, London, who received approximately 50% of the total recurrent HEIF funding allocated to ARTS Cluster.

**Figure 3.1 HEIF funding allocations for 2022-23 for ARTS Cluster Institutions (£)**

|  |           |  |
|--|-----------|--|
| The Arts University Plymouth                       | 0         |  |
| Contemporary Dance Trust (The Place)               | 0         |  |
| The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA) | 0         |  |
| The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama       | 0         |  |
| The Arts University Bournemouth                    | 270,148   |  |
| The National Film and Television School            | 286,004   |  |
| Royal Northern College of Music                    | 325,428   |  |
| The Royal College of Art                           | 352,364   |  |
| Royal College of Music                             | 379,763   |  |
| Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance     | 432,824   |  |
| Guildhall School of Music & Drama                  | 600,164   |  |
| LAMDA  | 1,294,477 |  |
| University of the Arts, London                     | 4,041,427 |  |

Figure 3.2 **HEIF funding allocation for 2022-23 for Cluster V Institutions (£)**

|  |           |  |
|--|-----------|--|
| London Business School                               | 5,183,861 |  |
| Queen Mary University of London                      | 5,292,000 |  |
| Newcastle University                                 | 5,325,801 |  |
| The University of Warwick                            | 5,390,517 |  |
| The University of Liverpool                          | 5,489,961 |  |
| The University of Bristol                            | 5,591,000 |  |
| The University of Cambridge                          | 5,670,000 |  |
| Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine | 5,670,000 |  |
| King's College London                                | 5,670,000 |  |
| The University of Birmingham                         | 5,670,000 |  |
| University College London                            | 5,670,000 |  |
| University of Nottingham                             | 5,670,000 |  |
| The University of Oxford                             | 5,670,000 |  |
| The University of Sheffield                          | 5,670,000 |  |
| The University of Southampton                        | 5,670,000 |  |
| The University of Leeds                              | 5,670,000 |  |
| The University of Manchester                         | 5,670,000 |  |

In addition, when compared further to just one member of Cluster V, the total funding for KE and impact allocated to all institutions in the ARTS Cluster could be considered minor. See Figure 3.3.

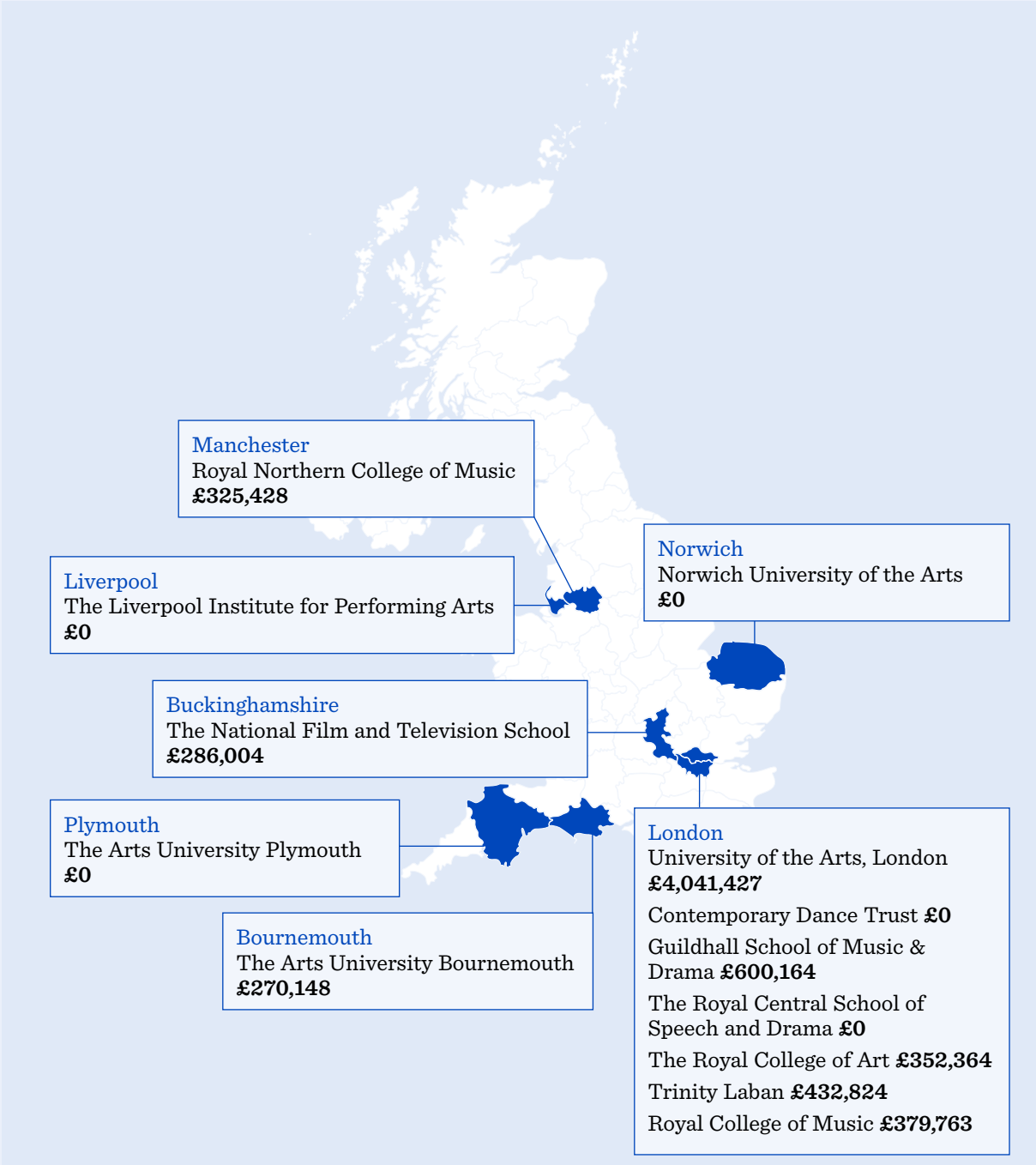
Figure 3.3 **Total HEIF funding allocations of all ARTS Cluster institutions for 2022-23 compared to funding allocated to one member of Cluster V (£)**

|   |                  |  |
|---|------------------|--|
| Total funding of <b>14 Arts specialist</b> institutions | <b>7,982,599</b> |  |
| Funding allocated to <b>one member</b> of Cluster V     | <b>5,670,000</b> |  |

It should be noted that the amounts represented in Figure 3.3 refer to the total recurrent HEIF grants and do not include the Recurrent Research Capital Investment Fund (RCIF) or the Specialist Provider Element, Participatory Research Fund or KE Funding for providers not in receipt of HEIF. We recognise that these additional grants represent substantial additional investment on behalf of Research England.

Figure 3.4 represents the map where the ARTS Cluster Institutions are located within the UK. Half of them (7 institutions) are clustered in London. Hence, approximately 83.5% (£6,668,195) of total HEIF funding allocation in 2022-23 was concentrated in London, while some institutions located in other regions did not receive HEIF funding, such as The Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts, Norwich University of the Arts, and the Arts University Plymouth.

**Figure 3.4 HEIF allocation for 2022-23 to ARTS Cluster Institutions by region**



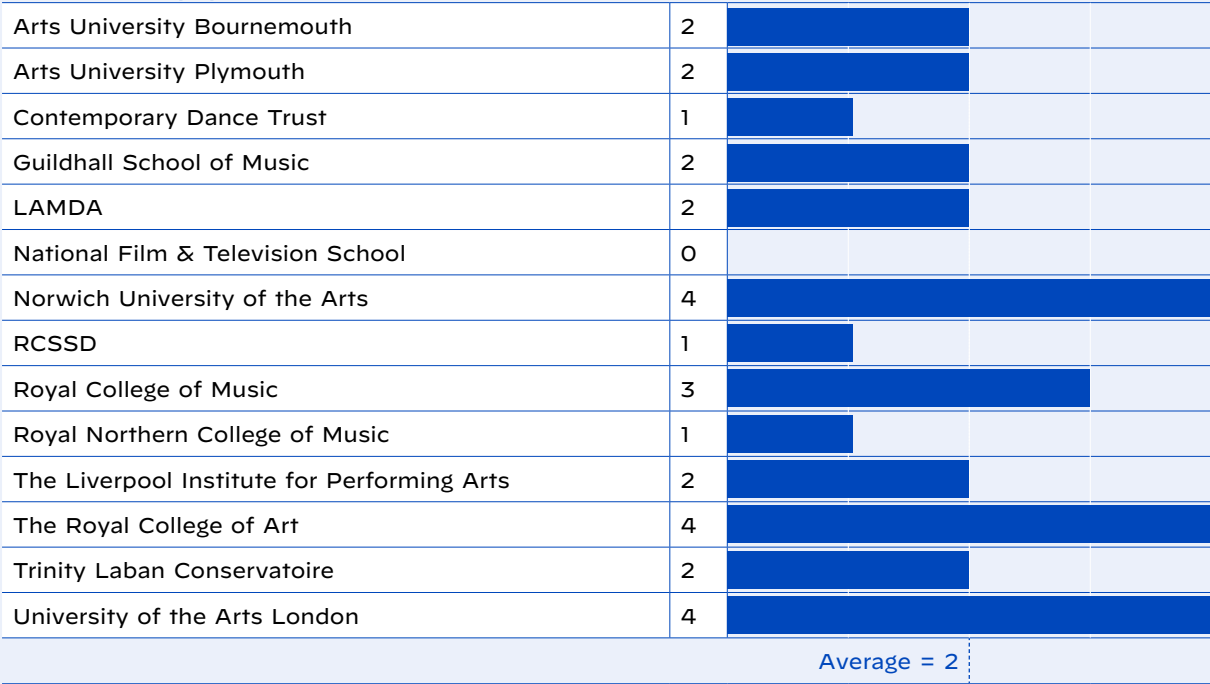


### 3.2 Common Narrative Themes

Returning to the close textual analysis we undertook of the KEF narratives submitted to the ARTS Cluster, the following similarities between the KE activities of small specialist HEIs were noted:

- There was a strong emphasis on cultural place-making through localised and intensive engagement with local cultural economies and cultural capital.
- Engagement with Local Authorities was high, including membership of advisory groups, development initiatives and LA-led business initiatives.
- Collaborative relationships with local cultural or artistic organisations were also high, with one university reporting engagement with 64 local organisations.
- These institutions are very well networked, both locally, nationally and internationally, across sectoral, industrial, regional and educational networks.

Figure 3.5 Engagement with Local Authorities

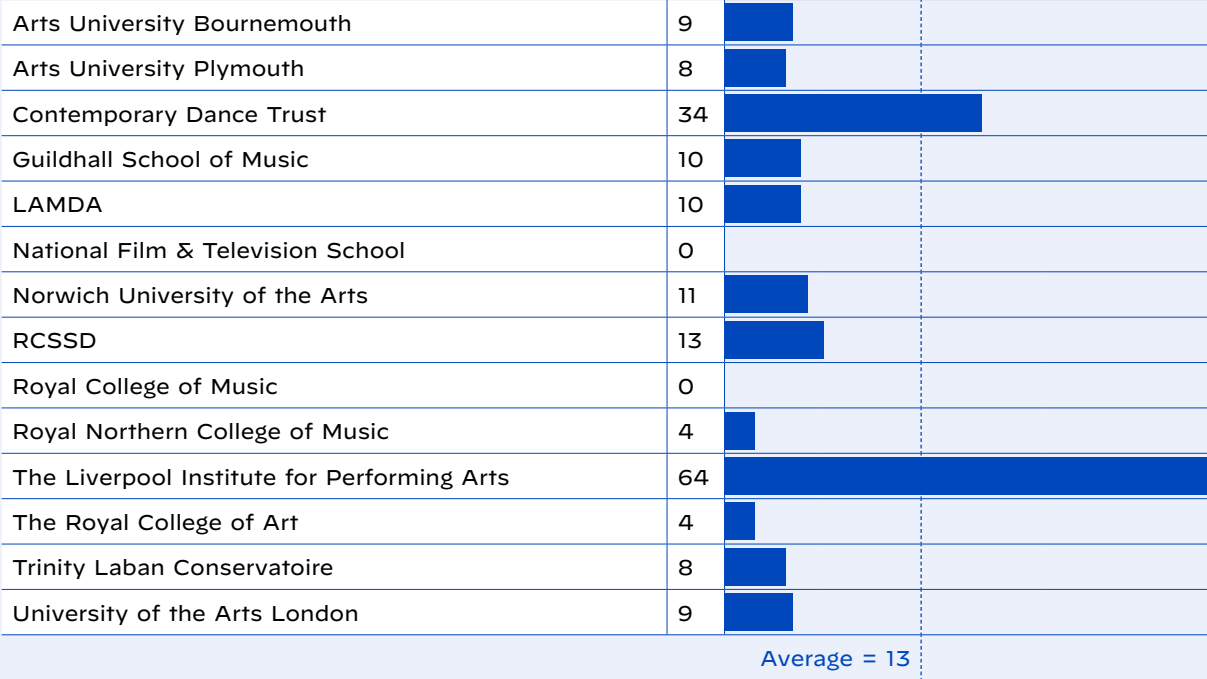


Most of the fourteen narrative submissions to the ARTS Cluster report place-based initiatives which are embedded throughout their KEI strategies. Most of the members contribute to strategic committees and boards focussed on regeneration and growth at city and regional levels and report on their Civic Strategies or Civic Missions. Figure 3.5 shows that, on average, each member of the ARTS Cluster was engaged with two local authorities, including participation in large development initiatives such as the Kings Cross Knowledge Quarter and the London Industrial Strategy. Many also report membership of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) across the country.

The narratives also reported a high level of interaction and collaboration with local community organisations, such as charities, youth support programmes, health and wellbeing groups and organisations which support minority groups. As depicted in Figure 3.6, the range extended

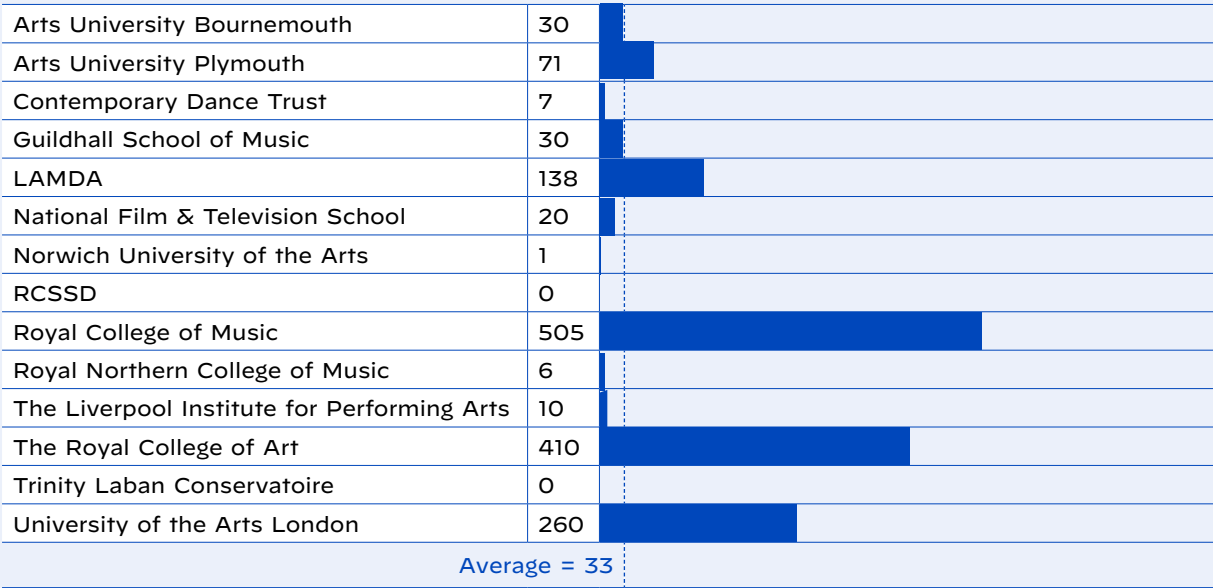
from 64 down to 4, with most members interacting with around 10. This demonstrates how deeply these institutions are embedded within their local communities as cornerstone organisations supporting not only the cultural life of their regions and beyond, but also as key contributors to improving social inclusion and local economies. Knowledge Exchange of this type cannot be easily recorded or recognised through KEF metrics, as they may be based upon academics sitting on advisory boards, offering networking opportunities or strategic advice.

**Figure 3.6 Engagement with local community organisations**



The levels of engagement with local arts or cultural organisations and practitioners as reported in the narratives was impressive for particular HEIs, representing a huge range of cultural activity – from the British Film Institute to local artists, sculptors and musicians. The number of arts organisations or practitioners engaged is shown in Figure 3.7, with an average of 33 per institution, although the range extends from 0 to 200. These collaborative relationships represent how small specialist institutions support their respective sectors, such as music, performing arts or visual arts.

Figure 3.7 Engagement with local cultural organisations/practitioners



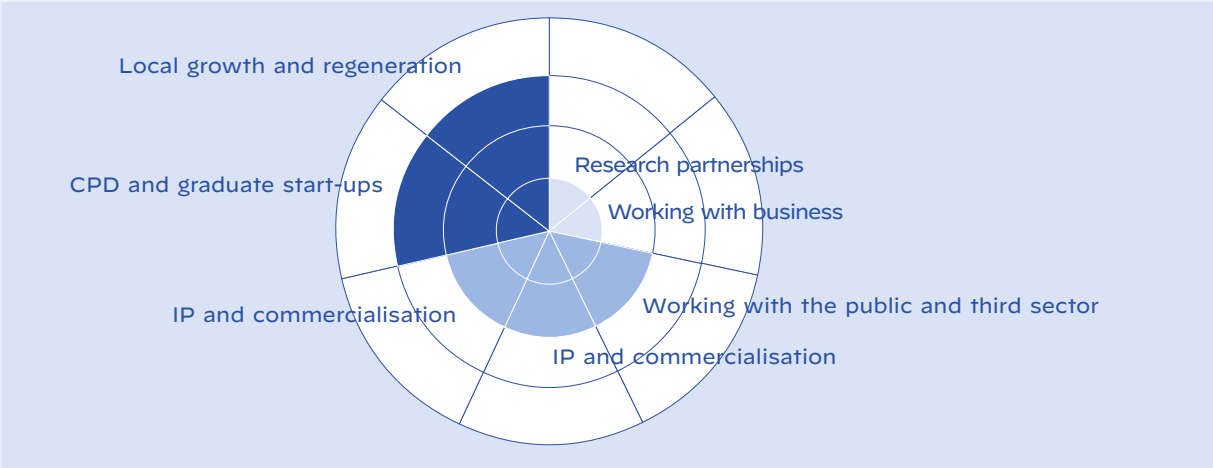
Whether or not particular organisations or practitioners were named in the narratives, all SSIs under consideration in this chapter contribute to the health and longevity of their sectors through providing trained graduates for employment within them. One of the KEF metrics which does lend itself to SSIs is the measurement of Graduate Start Ups, which are supported consistently throughout the group. The KEF3 Dashboard for ARTS (Figure 3.8) shows that the cluster performs best overall in Local growth and regeneration, as previously discussed, and CPD and grad start-ups.

Figure 3.8 KEF3 Dashboard

**Cluster ARTS**

Specialist institutions coverings arts, music and drama (as defined by a very high concentration of academic staff in these disciplines). A range of sizes and institutions, although many are relatively small and specialist.

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| Research partnerships                    | Very low |
| Working with business                    | Very low |
| Working with the public and third sector | Low      |
| IP and commercialisation                 | Low      |
| Public and community engagement          | Low      |
| CPD and graduate start-ups               | Medium   |
| Local growth and regeneration            | Medium   |



### **3.3 Emphasis on public cultural engagement**

Despite the metric displayed for Public and Community Engagement in Figure 3.8, we noted a huge number of public events provided by the conservatoires and performing arts colleges; from student performances which are open to the public, to specifically designed public engagement festivals, to free lunchtime concerts. The impact of how the KEF metrics interact with this provision was discussed at some length in the interviews we conducted, which are analysed in chapters 4 and 5. Total mentions of public cultural events within the narratives reach 505 within one academic year, signifying the emphasis placed by these institutions on public cultural engagement and creating cultural capital.

We also noted a high number of KE initiatives involving the public, such as coaching programmes and short courses - many of which were aimed at young people. There were 111 separate and distinct KE initiatives mentioned, of which 47 were Continued Professional Development (CPD) courses for both the public and professional arts or cultural practitioners. Therefore, despite their comparatively small investment from Research England, the members of the KEF3 ARTS Cluster have contributed to supporting and generating cultural capital and improving local cultural economies and social inclusion, to a level that far outstrips both their size and income streams.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

In conclusion, small specialist arts institutions are contributing to their own sectors through graduate start ups, CPD courses and cultural capital, but also to regional and national cultural capital and the cultural economy as epi-centres of cultural engagement and development. The narratives display high levels of engagement with social justice, public health and wellbeing and the climate emergency, but because these efforts cannot always be metricised or measured, they are not represented well in the KEF metrics.

## 4. The KEF as a policy instrument to support KE: views from the sector

Dr Federica Rossi

Based on six interviews with eight people involved in the management of KE activities at six HEIs that are part of the ARTS cluster, we discuss the sector’s view of the role of the KEF in the policy landscape, and the advantages and limitations of this instrument. The following table lists the institutions and roles of the people who were interviewed

Table 4.1 Interviewees’ details

| HEI                                 | Position of interviewee(s)   |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| University for the Creative Arts    | Director of Strategy and Knowledge Exchange  |
| Arts University Bournemouth         | Head of Innovation and Knowledge Exchange  |
| Norwich University of the Arts      | Dean for Research and Knowledge Exchange<br>Director of Knowledge Exchange and Employability |
| Royal Northern College of Music     | Head of Enterprise (Academic)<br>Senior Lecturer in Music Psychology                         |
| Guildhall School of Music and Drama | Head of Innovation<br>Creative Partnerships & Programmes Manager                             |
| Royal College of Arts               | Head of Knowledge Exchange   |

### 4.1 The role of the KEF in the policy landscape

The KEF sits among a range of other policy tools – some introduced several years earlier, some introduced more recently – which have the objective to support and/or incentivize HEI’s engagement in knowledge exchange (KE). These include:

- The Higher Education and Business and Community Innovation (HE-BCI) survey, which is a yearly data collection exercise which requests HEIs to submit data about a range of KE activities. Some information from the HE-BCI is used to compute the funding allocation that (some) HEIs receive from the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) scheme, based on a formula whose main component is the income that HEIs derive from various KE activities. The information to populate the metrics in the KEF exercise is also extracted from the HE-BCI.
- While not all HEIs are in receipt of HEIF funding (as there is a minimum income threshold below which HEIs are not funded), after the pandemic the government decided to make a payment to support KE in HEIs that are not in receipt of HEIF funding for two years. Many small specialist institutions received this [KE funding package](#).

- The KE Concordat, [a set of principles designed to guide KE activities](#), to which HEIs are required to subscribe. Engagement with the concordat demonstrates to governments and other agencies that universities are committed to a wide range of high quality activities that enhance communities, society and the economy. As part of the Concordat, HEIs that are signatories to the process were requested to produce a detailed audit of their knowledge exchange infrastructure, which was then evaluated through a process of peer review, and which the interviewees have reported to be very useful.
- There are also other smaller initiatives that were mentioned in the interview. For example, the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) have developed a [KE self assessment tool for HEI's public engagement activities](#), that some interviewees have reported to be very useful.

The impression from the interviews with small specialist HEIs is that, while HEIs are clear about the objectives and roles that most of these policy tools are supposed to fulfill, this is not the case for the KEF.

The HE-BCI data is used to inform HEIF allocation and it allows HEIs to perform comparative analyses of their performance. The data from HE-BCI gives the government a sense of the ROI on public investment. It is a blunt proxy but effective, and the administrative burden on HEIs is manageable, as most data can be pulled out of the HEI's finance system (provided that the system is structured appropriately).

*“We already had HE-BCI as a openly, publicly published data set that we could use to do benchmarking, comparative performance analysis, and all of that. We could do that, our funders could do that.”*

The Concordat provides a structure to help HEIs reflect on how they organise their KE activities and also gives them general principles as well as specific guidance on how to improve their KE management processes.

*“The KE Concordat exercise was extremely helpful and I think really well conceived as a means of supporting universities to reflect upon how they introduce a kind of culture of continuous improvement into their KE activities and hold themselves accountable for delivering on that. And so for me, the concordat and HE-BCIs are really complementary, I think.”*

In addition, there are monetary instruments like the HEIF which funds HEI that perform well in KE, and the additional post-pandemic funding for HEIs that are not in receipt of HEIF. The latter, according to some interviewees, has allowed them to implement some strategic initiatives which are likely to boost their KE activities, and particularly their engagement with business, in the future.

*“So that enabled us to take a really different view about what we would do with knowledge exchange in the university. And we chose to invest that money in two big areas, because obviously, you can imagine, you know, you have a complete drought of money from the government for 11 years at that point, and then they give you some money, you want to really make something out of it. So we chose two big initiatives.”*

KEF sits quite uneasily among this range of policy tools. Interviewees are unclear about what the role of this instrument is, and what are the stakeholders that are supposed to benefit from it. On the one hand, it is unclear what is the original contribution that the exercise is making. In terms of metrics, the KEF simply collects metrics that are already available in the HE-BCI survey, so it does not add a lot of new information, and it does not provide an evaluation of the performance of the HEI.

“It’s a data dashboard exercise. There’s very few new metrics in there that we didn’t have before and actually the way in which they’re presented is not necessarily intuitive as a sort of non expert to understand what the data is that you’re seeing.”

Interestingly, the exercise is often misunderstood within the HEI sector itself, by people who aren’t close to it. Because its name sounds similar to REF and TEF, many people assume that it is a similar kind of exercise and that it provides an assessment or qualitative judgement of HEI’s KE performance, when actually all it does is providing a new way to visualise existing data and it facilitates some comparisons between HEIs. Additionally, the KEF is not associated with a clear ranking or award (such as the REF or TEF) and therefore it is more difficult to interpret by audiences that are not experts of KE.

On the other hand, it is not clear who the KEF is for. Numerous interviewees remark on the lack of clarity about who is the designated audience for the KEF.

“But then overall the value of producing the narratives, I think the question is who the audience is. You know there is a value to producing these narratives if there is an audience that values them. And I’m not entirely clear beyond our funders.”

“We spend ages every year crafting that narrative. I mean, who knows if anybody ever reads it? I don’t know if they do or not. I mean, it’s, I think, even the team that do KEF now have decided, haven’t they, that it’s not, it’s not, it’s not businesses that are reading it, I think it’s probably other universities in the main.”

“With KEF I’m still not really clear about what it’s seeking to achieve and what value it’s trying to create because I don’t necessarily think it’s added a lot of value in that comparative analysis space.”

While originally the KEF was envisaged as an exercise of information collection and sharing that would help businesses to engage with HEIs by making it easier to gather information about potential partners in collaborations, over time it has become apparent that it is not a useful tool for industry. This is because the majority of interactions between HEIs and industry do not originate from database searches but from personal interactions.

The KEF has also not been picked up by the media, unlike the outcomes of the REF and TEF, and it is not clear what use the narratives have for funders and for other universities.

The lack of clarity about who the audience should be, makes it difficult for HEIs to tailor the narrative to the interests of potential readers. More importantly, it makes the whole exercise a bit fuzzy and lacking direction. In some cases, the lack of media attention has led HEIs to put a bit less effort into crafting the narratives the second and third time, since the first ones were not discussed widely.



## 4.2 The value of the KEF for HEIs

So what is the value of the KEF for the HEIs? The interviewees do admit that the KEF exercise has some benefits for the HEI. First, it has encouraged universities to think more strategically about KE, by providing an opportunity to discuss the HEI's KE engagement in an organization-wide perspective. It has also encouraged some HEIs to develop specific KE strategies which were previously missing (although the incentive to develop such strategies came not only from the KEF but also from the engagement in other initiatives such as the KE concordat).

“And then having to articulate your local context, how you're working with local government generation, how you're doing public community engagement. Again, it is really useful in helping..... Talk about who you are and who you want to be, but also actually be it.”

“And since we introduced that strategy, what I would say is that the our activities have evolved to become much more strategic because they've been, they've had that now that kind of narrative context, people now much better understand why we're doing these things and what our motivation is and what we're trying to achieve.”

Second, since the results of the KEF are shared publicly, the visibility of HEIs' KE activities has increased. This has made various stakeholders, internal and external, such as governors, external partners and the wider sector, more aware of the importance of KE. The culture of the organisation has changed, not only with KE being given greater importance, but also with some more subtle cultural changes like people starting to attribute financial value to collaborations. These cultural changes have led to some substantial changes, such as the introduction of academic career progression patterns based on success in KE and not only in teaching and/or research. Since KE is more important for the institutions, it has also encouraged HEIs, particularly small specialists, to work together to advocate for their interests with government in relation to KE.

“I think it certainly has had a value in giving KE a kind of equivalency to research and teaching and learning. Firmly, you know, kind of firmly established within the HE policy space as the sort of third official academic mission of universities.”

“I think the KEF has had a useful [inaudible], shaping the faculty in terms of people [...] you can now become a professor within a knowledge exchange pathway. I think that's really a byproduct of this, if you like, it changed the cultures in which academia works.”

“Historically, I think we've not been great at talking to each other.[...] we're really starting to share and recognise that actually, for us to advocate for ourselves and our value. We need to work together. We need to work collectively we need to have one voice.”

Third, the KEF can be useful as a tool to motivate academics to engage in KE, and to encourage managers to give KE more importance.

“In its current form, KEF is most useful as an internal lever to advocate for the importance of doing well in this area. So I've used it to be able to really push on my senior management team to say, look, you know, we have to do better, we have to be clear, we have to monitor, you know, this is really important. So, in terms of internal advocacy, that's great.”



Fourth, the KEF has helped HEIs become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses in KE. This has been enabled by the narratives as well as by the metrics, which help to see how the institution is doing, and if it actually does what it says it does. The comparison with other HEIs also helps the organization to see where it could do better.

“Looking at some of the narratives can provide some inspiration in terms of, you know, where, where we might, if we’ve got similar areas, like where we might be able to develop.”

“I feel like a good thing about KEF is the potential for sharing best practices.”

“But then one year we had a bit of a drop in research income, and those are corresponding drop in our public community engagement. So it’s useful from that point of view, being able to see where the data is and sense check your identity if you’re saying you’re this type of institution, that should be reflected in the data.”

Some HEI have remarked on the value of being part of the KEF pilot initiative, as it gave them a better perspective on the exercise and allowed them to advocate for the inclusion of the narratives part as the data-driven metrics would not be sufficient to represent the actual engagement of small specialist HEIs.

“So ...we were part of the KEF pilot, which is a really interesting and really useful experience. I think the KEF has kind of been initially conceived, it was just going to be a data-driven metric in the entire sector and said, no, we’ve got to tell the story. You can see a real sort of tussle there.”

#### **4.3 Advantages and drawbacks of KEF metrics and narratives**

We also collected more detailed views concerning the advantages and drawbacks of the two components of the KEF, the metrics and the narratives.

With regards to the metrics, there is broad agreement on the limitations of KEF metrics for small specialists. Some outcomes that result from KE initiatives are not part of the KEF, for different reasons. Some outcomes can be measured in monetary terms, but they are not captured in the KEF’s metrics – for example, investment received by the university, or investments attracted in the region as a consequence of the HEI’s KE activities. Other outcomes do not have clear financial metrics for them, such as the HEI’s ‘soft power’ in the region. Yet other outcomes are missed because, although they have a financial metric, the income is not accrued by the university, such as when staff derive private income from their musical or artistic performances, or the university does not have a good system for recording the data (for example, some HEIs do not categorise their contract according to whether they involve SMEs or larger organisations). Moreover, the metrics that are meaningful for some small specialist HEIs, for example live and online audience numbers (which are important for performing arts institutions) are not included in the funding formula. The self assessment indicator for public engagement is perceived by some to be very crude and too subjective.

“Because we had to switch away from doing the kind of consultancy work that brings income into the university, because we just didn’t have anybody to do that work as well, our KEF for two years after that is going to look terrible, because it looks like we’re actually generating

less money for the university, because there's no way to show that we got, you know, 4.6 million pounds worth of capital into the university as a result of that funding.”

“We were really active in our communities, you know, we are on every board, you know, the economic strategy board for the region, the local enterprise partnership, innovation, but all those things we do as a university, so actually our kind of, our soft power in the region is huge. But again, because it's not something that has a financial metric, then you know, there's no way of representing that as you know, within your HE-BCI return.”

“Our Director of Finance said to me, you know, there must be something that we can put in one of these boxes, because of all the work that's gone on that project, but there was just absolutely nothing. It's just everything is so geared to money being the metric.”

In some cases, even if the data about some forms of KE could be collected in theory, in practice it is not reported because collecting the data would be too resource intensive and this data collection would require too much of the HEI's resources, so the HEI does not collect the data.

“We're a tiny, tiny staff body, and if we did collect that data, we'd need one person collecting it all year, whereas a big institution might have 10% of their graduates earning freelance income and a whole team dedicated to alumni data. [...] we don't have the resources to capture that data and so as a result, you know shamefully our segment on enterprise and entrepreneurship looks terrible and yet we are one of the leading institutions who are doing that.”

“We are very poor at the moment in student startups. And this is really difficult for us because we have quite a lot of engagement with our alumni and student body in terms of supporting them. [...] But we don't capture, we don't have the outputs of those put partly because we don't have the manpower.”

Sometimes, the income produced by the HEI's KE activities provides a distorted picture, because the KE activity from which the HEI derives the most income is not the one which the HEI considers most valuable. An example is a conservatoire deriving a lot of income from the use of their facilities (such as for box office sales) but actually considering their ability to place their students in the music industry as a much more important form of KE – which is however unaccounted for in the KEF.

“None of the knowledge exchange metrics recognise the fact that we send 150 students out into the world on placement every year for example. But we, so we need to get good at the things that the metrics do capture.”

The ARTS cluster is also very heterogeneous, with HEIs of different size and characterised by different specialisations. For example, some HEIs do relatively well in IP and commercialisation, but badly in local growth and regeneration activities. Some HEIs seem to be good at monitoring student startups and grads, others admit that they do not have the resources to collect this data.

In terms of the narratives, HEIs agree that there are several positive aspects to them. They allow the HEI to “shout about” the things they are doing well. Having to write the narrative statement encourages HEIs to write coherently and strategically about their KE engagement, and this writing can be repurposed and reused for other objectives (there are also other

descriptive statements that have a similar benefit, such as the HEIF Accountability Statement and the KE Concordat).

“Because then these texts are utilised, I send them to Deans, I send them to Research Centre Directors. I prompt them by saying “look at it and please use these texts for your applications for your bids”.....because these texts quite often can be utilised for something else.”

The narratives offer the opportunity to provide a “big picture” impression of what the HEI is doing. They also allow the HEI to talk about important projects and initiatives that are not captured by the metrics.

The fact that the narratives have some constraints in terms of number of words and structure that needs to be followed, is not perceived to be a problem by the interviewees. Having a relatively strict word count forces HEIs to be very clear, concise and strategic about the message they want to deliver. Some HEIs have mentioned that since the narrative statements are repeated every year, what they would like to do is to use each statement to highlight a different aspect of their KE engagement, so that the narratives provide a more articulated story over time. While this is what they would have liked to do, in practice due to lack of time and resources they have ended up presenting very similar statements every year. One interviewee claimed that they would have liked to have the opportunity to present some visual images in the narratives as they are a visual arts college and it would have been helpful. Another suggested that there could be more space for discussing the personal impact of KE activities, including testimonials and case studies.

“So, I think I think having the structure there is useful and actually it’s a really good skill for us to develop internally to be able to tell the story about what we’re doing in a in a short space of words, he says, having rambled at you for about 50 minutes, but you know. It’s an important thing. So yeah, I think I should be. Constraints are good and useful.”

“What I really wanted to do with it after that, which we haven’t yet, was to theme each report a bit more to maybe have one year right, which is going to about everything we do around sustainability and tell the narrative of that all the other EU focus more on cultural and mental or you kind of theme it slightly. So, you can tell a bit of a richer story about what it is that you’re doing. I haven’t done that. I think the last one I did was similarly about resourcing issues, having time to do it.”

But overall, there are not many issues with the structure and word count per se. Rather, it is the visibility of the narratives that could be improved. Several HEIs remarked that the reading figures for the narratives are not very good, and therefore they don’t seem to warrant the effort placed into writing them. The narratives are not going to be the way in which potential partners are going to discover HEIs and decide to work with them – it is up to HEIs themselves to make themselves discoverable and “tell their own stories”.

“But yeah, I think it’s I think it’s, it’s as ever with the creative universities, it’s up to us to tell our own stories, isn’t it? I don’t think that people are going to find us or think that we’re exciting to work with really through that as a route.”

#### 4.4 Advantages and drawbacks of KEF metrics and narratives

While there is general agreement on the limitations of the KEF, particularly in relation to the metrics, there is much less alignment with respect to proposed solutions. Some interviewees have suggested that it would be beneficial to make an effort to collect data on KE activities that small specialist HEIs are more engaged in and which are currently not captured. For example,

“if there was a way to have a kind of a Value Indicator for social impact or social benefits, that would be fantastic.”

Others suggest that adding new metrics, particularly non-financial ones, would place too much administrative burdens on the HEIs. This would end up further disadvantaging smaller HEIs with fewer resources and exacerbating inequalities within the sector. Moreover, the process through which new metrics should be devised is not clear. The current consultation approach that Research England is taking in order to improve and extend its HE-BCI metrics is very incremental and not very successful (“tinkering around the other possible metrics”), and it might be more productive to adopt a more articulated approach, for example by relying on the KE concordat process:

“I think the concordat might be a better way over a longer period of time of universities working together to develop more meaningful measurement frameworks. And then I think out of that out of those processes could come some intelligence about what Research England might consider, in the future, as other sector metrics.”

The interviewees have reported contrasting opinions about what could be done to make the KEF more relevant. One view is that the exercise should be strengthened and formally assessed, just like the REF and TEF.

“And the KEF needs to be treated with as much value as REF and TEF. I mean, I would go so far as to say there’ll come a day when it is more important than REF and TEF. So it needs that kind of big exercise around it. I know this is time-consuming for everyone and everyone dreads the REF and the TEF coming, but KEF is just as important. It needs a narrative submission that is properly assessed by a panel that is chosen through a rigorous process and it needs to have something meaningful out the other end that is linked to funding.”

Others have instead expressed strong concerns about the possibility that the KEF might be used to inform HEIF allocations, or that it could be transformed into some kind of league table.

Funding allocation is problematic, since the structure of the exercise is designed to allow comparative analyses between similar institutions rather than to classify them using a simple measure of performance. Another concern is that linking KEF to funding allocations would distort the nature of the exercise, whose primary objective should be to help HEIs to share best practices, rather than putting them in competition with each other.

Transforming the KEF into a league table exercise is also problematic because, while businesses might use it more, the exercise would be detrimental to small specialists that don’t have high income.

“Very concerned about the idea that KEF rather than HE-BCI might drive HEIF because, you know KEF is an interesting exercise in looking at in thinking about thinking about comparative data in the KE performance space, but the particular sort of methodology that it’s landed on for clustering and representing that data has certain assumptions and biases within it, whereas if you look at HEPCEs, it’s just income, it’s a very neutral indicator of performance.”

Some have suggested that there needs to be a different way to represent the impact that HEIs have through their KE, which is useful to policymakers and potential collaborators. Perhaps this could occur through thematic case studies, or through a dedicated website, which businesses could browse in order to find out what HEIs are doing. One interviewee discussed how for small specialists it is difficult to often separate KE from research, since new knowledge is often produced through KE, and therefore the boundaries between their KE activities and the research impact processes that can be submitted to the REF in the form of case studies, are very blurred. These HEIs lose out from being unable to craft impact case studies around their KE engagement.

“And quite rightly, you know, ministers, civil servants, you know, our funders want to better understand what the stories are behind the data. I don’t think those stories are going to be better told by more metrics [...] Just a different type of exercise is required. Is there something around thematic case studies.”

I suppose that alongside KEF, it would be great to have some kind of nationally recognised opportunity to tell these stories in a different kind of a way. Because, you know, I do think it’d be really interesting, for instance, if there was a website, or something that a business that wanted to work with universities could go on to, to look at the projects, because I think it’s the projects that really exemplify, you know, what, what the nature of knowledge is, and how people could work with this.”

## 4.5 Conclusion

The KEF sits within a set of initiatives that are helping to foster a culture of KE in UK HEIs and in the entire university system. This culture in turn is producing actual changes in HEIs’ behaviour – including the prioritization of KE activities and the greater willingness to work together with other small and specialist arts HEIs to advance the interests of the sector. It is also leading to changes in and policies / structures – such as the formulation of explicit KE strategies, the set up of formal KE roles and the creation of career pathways based on success in KE and not just in research and teaching.

Hence, the KEF is valuable to HEIs, particularly as a tool to promote cultural change and emphasise the visibility and value of KE – for example as a tool to motivate academics to engage in KE, and to encourage managers to give KE more importance. It has also helped HEIs to improve their awareness of their strengths and weaknesses in KE, which is important in order to design better strategies.

However, within the broader set of policy initiatives, the role of the KEF is not so clear. The KEF needs better clarity and direction about its purpose and the audiences that it is targeting.

There is general consensus that the metrics collected by the KEF miss some key outcomes that are very important for small and specialist arts institutions, such as:

Outcomes that can be measured in monetary terms, but they are not captured in the KEF's metrics – for example, investment received by the university, or investments attracted in the region as a consequence of the HEI's KE activities

- Outcomes that do not have clear financial metrics for them, such the HEI's 'soft power' in the region.
- Outcomes for which, although they have a financial metric, the income is not accrued or recorded by the university (such as when staff derive private income from their musical or artistic performances, or the university does not have a good system for recording the data)
- Outcomes which are very valuable to the university (for example, the ability to place graduates in relevant professional roles) although they do not bring in income
- Outcomes which are not included in the funding formula (for example live and online audience numbers)
- The problems with metrics are too great for the KEF to be an effective performance measurement tool, and the effort to collect good metrics might outweigh any advantage of better measurement. Instead, the KEF seems to work best as a best practice and benchmarking exercise, primarily aimed at HEIs themselves and perhaps at funding bodies.
- The method used to revise the KEF needs to be updated and become more inclusive and less incremental.



# 5. The benefits and shortcomings of KEF for small specialist institutions: a narrative approach

**Dr Josh Weeks**

Much of the discussion around the benefits of knowledge exchange, as well as the failure of funding bodies to recognise and reward those benefits, centres on narrative. On the one hand, there is widespread agreement among collaborators and stakeholders that knowledge exchange is a source of rich, often overlapping stories. In this way, the articulation of the value of knowledge exchange clearly requires a narrative approach. There is also the suggestion, however, that systems such as KEF reduce those stories to their financial bare bones by conflating impact with income. As one interviewee put it to us: “as ever with the creative universities, it’s up to us to tell our own stories” (all citations are anonymised).

In this section, we focus on the fuller, more fleshed out stories that KEF fails to accommodate. Drawing on some of the interviews from the previous chapter, we explore the distance between quantitative and qualitative accounts of knowledge exchange, before asking: how helpful are the KEF narrative statements in supplementing, contextualising or even challenging existing metrics?

## 5.1 The official story

An overarching theme of the interviews was the criticism of KEF as a “data-driven exercise” that only measures financial value.

“My one kind of criticism of the KEF overall: the main data set for the KEF is the HE-BCI, and the HE-BCI measures income. It’s a really bold mechanism. It measures incomes. That’s all it does. I think the KEF then tries to make it seem like there’s something more interesting happening with the data that it’s putting out [...] like there is something else happening there and it’s not. It’s literally just a measure of how much income you have pulled in as an institution relative to institutions that are a bit like you.”

“It’s just everything is so geared to money being the metric.”

“the single biggest problem is the metrics count money into the institution. Knowledge exchange is not about money into the institution, it’s about the impact that you can have in the wider world, whether that’s enabling another business to make more money or the economy to grow, or to have social benefit. So the metrics at the moment don’t count either of those.”

In assessing knowledge exchange in terms of income, these responses suggest, KEF is effectively a repackaging of HE-BCI. Not only does emphasising the quantitative over the qualitative massively oversimplify knowledge exchange, it also obscures the non-financial

benefits that emerge from such projects. Interestingly, however, despite the overriding sense that KEF risks ‘minimising the actual quality of knowledge exchange activity that institutions can engage in’, there was also the suggestion that even financial value is missed.

“that’s a story that’s never going to be told through KEF because it’s like, in the metrics, they’re looking for a direct relationship between the value that we bring to a situation as makers of creative knowledge and monetary benefits. And sometimes that’s a direct relationship, but actually sometimes the value that we’re bringing to that might be shown as a financial benefit, but not in our books [...] some of the work that we do is quite indirect, but it’s absolutely vital.”

“It’s not quite even that the financial value is a problem. But actually, yeah, we’re not capturing most of it anyway.”

From this perspective, the story of knowledge exchange offered by KEF is limited on two counts. On the one hand, it is too money-focused. On the other, the parameters of this focus are too narrow, obscuring financial value that cannot be traced directly back to the institution.

## 5.2 The untold story

One of key areas in which financial value was said to be overlooked is in the complementary relationship between the arts and STEM subjects. This included (but was not limited to) the value of the arts in communicating scientific research to the public:

“Having the resources to work and support more STEM aligned subjects [...] it opened up a whole new avenue for us of being able to go to all these different organisations and actually do useful and valid work with them.”

“I think there’s also a massive story that is kind of starting to be told in our region now, which is really pleasing, actually, after all the work that we’ve done, which is around why we are a vital partner in unexpected projects [...] we’re trying to tell this story regionally about this holistic approach and why scientists on our doorstep need creative thinkers.”

“We’ve just got started to get a project off the ground which looks at where creativity might be situated in the brain [...] we’ve just started to do some experiments looking at what happens when you spontaneously create something in a music improvisation and what happens with your brain waves.”

Part of the untold story of knowledge exchange, then, involves processes such as helping scientists to ‘commercialise their science’, as well as “supporting innovation, prototyping, testing, and design thinking with the business community”. But at the same time, we must also take into account social value, which is to say, aspects of knowledge exchange that are geared towards the betterment of local and global communities (as opposed to profit).

“When knowledge exchange became a thing, and when the KEF was introduced, our strength is that this is absolutely nothing new for us. All of our students, for the 50 years that we’ve existed, all of our students perform to the general public every day. So the strength is that it’s all there. The essence of knowledge exchange is absolutely everything that we do. It’s about students sharing their art with the world.”



“We have a whole building of students that want to change the world and we have a load of degree programme modules that enable them to do it [...] none of that is captured anywhere”.

“It’s not about all the investment of money into the HEI. If anything, it should be about the opposite, all the money that the university is giving away in order to support the local economy and local communities.”

### 5.3 The emerging story

On the whole, the KEF narrative statements were viewed as an outlet for telling “the story of the things we don’t get to shout about elsewhere.” The narratives were also said to encourage internal reflection and dialogue between institutions.

“I think what it did or what it’s done effectively is kind of give a focus for the institution to be able to have those discussions around the type of activity and the value of activity. And it has kind of really helped make it visible – and that’s to academics and students, to external patterns, to governors, to the wider sector.”

“It does force us as an institution to write those narratives and to develop them and to think about how we might be representatives and start evaluation”

“In its current form, KEF is most useful as an internal lever to advocate for the importance of doing well in this area [...] I think it’s also really helped with getting the HE sector to talk to each other.”

The overriding sense was that the narrative statements represent a necessary alternative to HE-BCI – specifically by going beyond numerical data. “I think it’s also about the connections we can make in a storytelling way between projects that are thematically linked,” said one interviewee. “It’s also about the previous statements as well, in terms of, a continuation of the story, of how and where projects are developed”. And yet, despite the consensus that this emerging story needs to be told, there were doubts about the narratives’ broader readership.

“the KEF narrative statements are the only outlet for that information [...] it’s more about the visibility of them once they’re written.”

“I think they’re helpful in that respect. However, I don’t know how much, who’s reading them?”

“It tells the story that we need it to tell for the purposes of KEF, but it doesn’t tell the story that a member of the public might actually be interested in.”

The KEF narratives, then, were on the whole well-received, although there are lingering questions over their reach and significance. Meanwhile, the question of how KEF might be improved or put to better use led to multiple, sometimes conflicting suggestions.

### 5.4 The Future story

The diversity of opinion regarding the future of KEF makes it difficult to offer any concrete recommendations.

“I’m very aware of saying anything that then turns into another massive reporting burden [...] To be honest, the compromise of having the narratives was a really good step towards that

and an acknowledgement of that and I think bounding the narratives to be quite limited in sort of scope and word count was a good thing as well.”

“Alongside KEF, it would be great to have some kind of nationally recognised opportunity to tell these stories in a different kind of way [...] it’d be really interesting, for instance, if there was a website or something that a business that wanted to work with universities could go onto to look at the projects.”

“Make it equivalent to REF and TEF [...] the KEF needs to be treated with as much value as REF and TEF. I mean, I would go so far as to say there’ll come a day when it is more important than REF and TEF.”

Small specialist institutions, it would appear, find themselves in a double-bind. On the one hand, there is clearly a need for a more comprehensive acknowledgement of the financial and non-financial value that these institutions produce through their knowledge exchange activities. The richness and complexity of such activities, moreover, transcends numerical data; it requires an approach capable of illustrating the bigger picture (and indeed, telling the bigger story). But at the same time, the limited personnel and resources of small specialist institutions makes it difficult to take on the extra burden that such an exercise would require. Funding bodies must address not just the stories that are going unnoticed, but also the structural conditions that may prevent them from being told.

## 5.5 Conclusion

At present, the array of narratives and stories that emerge through knowledge exchange projects remain undeveloped within KEF. By basing its metrics around income into the university, KEF fails to capture non-financial values (social, health, ecological etc.), as well overlooking financial value that is more indirect and longitudinal. What is more, while the KEF narrative statements provide an outlet for this hidden data, their limited readership suggests a lesser significance compared to REF and TEF. There is also a tension between the steps that would need to be taken to make the narratives richer and more visible and the extra burden that this would create for universities – particularly small specialist institutions.

Faced with these obstacles, small specialist institutions are taking it upon themselves to tell the stories of their collaborations. The interviews that form the basis of this publication are a case in point. And yet, for all of the knowledge exchange activities that these institutions have been a part of, the absence of an official platform from which to narrate and celebrate these activities risks painting an inaccurate picture that could affect funding and public perception. Connected to this risk, there is also a feeling that the individuals and relationships that are the very lifeblood of knowledge exchange are relegated to the margins.

As one interviewee put it: “I think the things that are missing are the human aspect of the projects that we run, which so often are based around transformation in some way, particularly on a personal level.” This human aspect will remain hidden for as long as numerical – and especially financial – metrics take the place of storytelling.

# Appendix A

Members of Cluster ARTS who submitted narrative statements to KEF3:

- Arts University Bournemouth
- Arts University Plymouth
- Contemporary Dance Trust
- Guildhall School of Music
- LAMDA
- National Film & Television School
- Norwich University of the Arts
- Royal Central School of Speech and Drama
- Royal College of Music
- Royal Northern College of Music
- The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts
- The Royal College of Art
- Trinity Laban Conservatoire
- University of the Arts London

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