

GuildHE response to:

HEFCE KEF Metrics Consultation

January 2018



About GuildHE

1. **GuildHE** is an officially recognised representative body for UK Higher Education. Our members include universities, university colleges, further education colleges and specialist institutions from both the traditional and private (“for profit” and “not for profit”) sectors. Member institutions include some major providers in professional subject areas including art, design and media, music and the performing arts; agriculture and food; education; maritime; health and sports.
2. The **United Kingdom Arts and Design Institutions Association (ukadia)**, a sub-association of GuildHE, is a group of specialist arts and design institutions from across the UK’s higher and further education sectors. We aim to promote, nationally and internationally, the key contributions of specialist colleges to the UK’s world-renowned reputation in visual arts, performance and the creative and cultural industries.
3. The **Consortium for Research Excellence, Support and Training (CREST)**, a sub-association of GuildHE, exists for institutions that have achieved high levels, or aspire to achieve high levels, of research excellence concentrated in smaller communities of research practice. It is the only non-geographic collaborative research network based within the UK.

Opening Comment

1. We welcome the increased focus on knowledge exchange and the development of the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF). We believe that the creation of the KEF offers a unique chance to acknowledge, evaluate and celebrate all the many different and diverse types of knowledge exchange wherever they are found throughout the UK.
2. We raise some overarching points on the purpose of the KEF, its relationship with the TEF and REF and governance processes before offering our thoughts on the five questions posed. We believe that these points need careful consideration even at this early stage of the KEF to ensure that an effective, useful and transformational framework is created.
3. We offer particular recommendations ideas for KEF and KE in our response to Question 5.

GuildHE, Woburn House, 20 Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9HB

Tel: 020 3393 6132, email: info@guildhe.ac.uk

Charity Number: 1012218

© GuildHE (This information may be freely used and copied for non-commercial purposes, provided that the source is acknowledged.)

Summary of recommendations

1. The development of the KEF must consider and appreciate the diversity of the higher education sector, including the full range of higher education providers (HEPs) within it.
2. In common with University Alliance and the Russell Group, we believe the KEF must therefore adopt a broad definition of knowledge exchange to recognise the fullest range of interactions.
3. Metrics used must be broad enough to recognise this and we would strongly argue that qualitative information is needed to supplement existing data, particularly to report on social returns.
4. If KEF is to act in part as a performance management tool, then any funding associated with it must not disqualify institutions based upon size and location.
 - a. For that reason, it would be unfair to develop an exercise that did not take account of the fact that institutions that receive HEIF have an automatic advantage through having greater capacity to develop and deliver KE activity.
 - b. In particular, the removal of the HEIF allocation threshold is essential. The system is unfair, impacts negatively upon the student experience, and unreasonably inhibits the capacity of small and specialist institutions to contribute to economic growth.
5. KEF offers the chance to experiment in developing new funding interventions. A small element of funding could be used directly to support small and specialist HEIs engaging in KE given that they are closely aligned to their communities and have lost ground to make up following the reduction in HEIF funding.

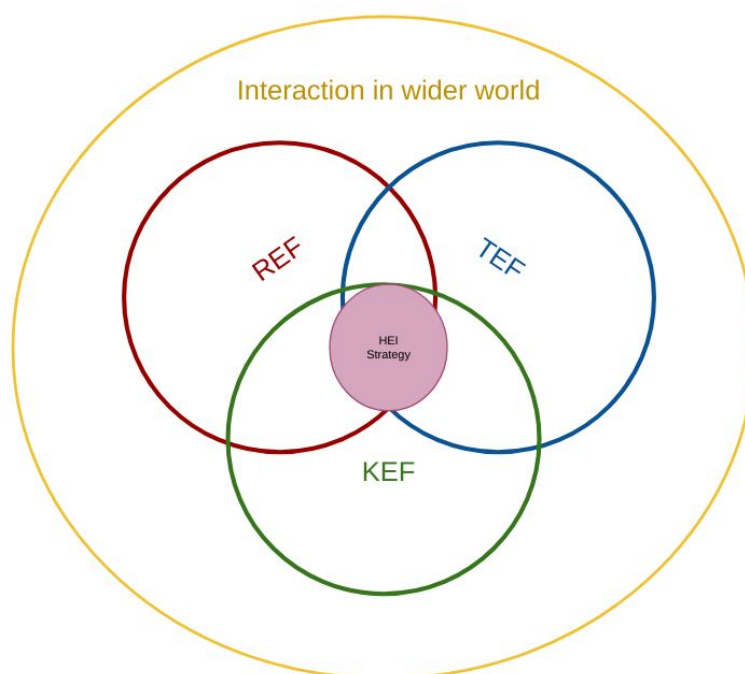
1. What do we mean by “Knowledge Exchange”?

1. “Knowledge exchange” (KE) is a term that covers a very wide range of activities. We believe that this broad range of activities must be considered in developing the KEF.
2. The definition (and indeed outcomes of KE) go much further than simply commercialisation of research and IP licensing¹.
3. The HE-BCI survey identifies the many types of KE:
 - 3.1. Facilitating the research exploitation process (non-technology transfer)
 - 3.2. Commercialisation (technology transfer, including spin-outs and licensing)
 - 3.3. Skills and human capital development
 - 3.4. Knowledge sharing and diffusion
 - 3.5. Supporting the community and public engagement
 - 3.6. Enterprise education and entrepreneurship
 - 3.7. Exploiting the HEI's physical assets

¹ Coates Ulrichsen, T (2015), Assessing the Economic Impacts of the Higher Education Innovation Fund, HEFCE

4. The recent report, 'The State of the English KE landscape', offers a helpful typology of benefits arising from KE which extend far beyond IP and commercialisation:
 - 4.1. Business, public and nonprofit sector benefits
 - 4.2. Social and community group benefits
 - 4.3. Wider economic and social benefits
 - 4.4. Institutional benefits
5. KE therefore covers a very broad range of activities. As such, and similar to the NCCPE, we raise some key questions that need considering in the development of the KEF. The government's announcement implies that the KEF could serve several functions:
 - 5.1. As a self-improvement tool for the sector, allowing individual HEPs to identify areas where they can improve their performance
 - 5.2. As a mechanism to allocate funding
 - 5.3. As a gateway to provide non HE partners and the public with useful intelligence about the sector to inform their understanding of it and interactions with it
6. These aims could be in conflict with one another. If KEF is to become a tool to drive funding within the sector, this risks creating competition within the sector to show off "good works" rather than develop meaningful strategic planning and interventions.
7. In addition, if the KEF is solely to drive funding decisions, we would question what the incentive would be for the devolved nations to participate in the exercise. We appreciate HEFCE's efforts so far to engage with the devolved administrations.
8. As knowledge exchange is a joint responsibility between the Office for Students (OfS) and UKRI, we draw particular attention to General Duty 2.2 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 that requires OfS to include "*choice amongst a diverse range of providers*". KE is equally as diverse, broad and varied depending upon the institution engaged in such activity. KEF therefore must pay attention to this requirement.

2. Fitting the KEF, REF & TEF together



9. Knowledge exchange does not exist in isolation from research and teaching within an institution. The development of KEF must consider how it interplays with both REF and TEF to ensure that double, and even triple counting, is taken careful account of.
10. HEPs of course contribute to their local and regional ecosystems (for example as place-builders and economic powerhouses). This is as a result of their research, teaching and knowledge exchange activities. REF, TEF and KEF all measure this to an extent, although not in a truly holistic manner. This is important to consider in order that KEF does not try to measure institutional impact. This distinction is likely to be tricky considering that KE is to a large part looking at how an HEI interacts with the wider world.
11. REF and KEF are most likely to overlap around the area of impact, especially research impact case studies. The KEF is likely to diverge in that it could look at the exploitation of knowledge outside of the institution/s where the original research is developed. It could consider research that is below the 2* threshold needed for REF where effective KE still occurs.
12. TEF and KEF are most likely to overlap around student outcomes and LEO not least as graduates are an ultimate example of knowledge exchange particularly when considering the typology of KE benefits outlined above.
13. Therefore, KEF needs to be careful not to replicate data collection already being undertaken in REF and TEF but to draw upon existing data. We believe this approach will both help minimise burden and ensure that robust data is provided for at least part of the exercise.

KEF Governance

14. The governance of the KEF needs careful consideration. At present, the majority of members on both the metrics panel and steering group come from within the HE Sector and from large institutions.
15. If KEF is to capture the full range of KE activity, representation to demonstrate the full diversity of the sector should be considered.
16. In addition, and importantly given that KE is all about working with the wider world outside HE, representation from outside the sector from a range of organisations of different shapes and sizes - business, charities and local government - should be considered.

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

17. We appreciate the efforts that HEFCE is already taking to develop a set of meaningful metrics and support the statement that KE is more than the commercialisation of research.
18. We believe that data alone will not be able to provide a fair and meaningful comparison between different HEPs. Contextual information will need to be provided, especially in order to capture the results of the widest range of successful collaborations.
19. It is also important to note whether an HEI has received HEIF. As the assessment of HEIF proves, this funding stream results in a high ROI, not in the least part due to those HEPs being able to introduce supporting KE structures. It would be illogical to compare HEPs like for like without taking account of the funding that they receive to carry out KE.
20. If the intention is to measure KE excellence wherever it is found and in whatever format, including HEIF income as pillar of KEF would result in a distortion that would disadvantage the majority of small and specialist institutions unless HEIF is extended to these institutions.
21. The development of a nation-wide Knowledge Exchange Framework should be a useful opportunity to extend the HEIF to all approved higher education providers on the OfS register of providers.
22. The Industrial Strategy White Paper even acknowledges: "university technology transfer offices sometimes lack the resources and skills to fully develop commercialisation opportunities, particularly in institutions that have historically undertaken less of this activity".²

² See page 79, The Industrial Strategy (2017), HM Government

23. Whilst we believe that HE-BCI is a good starting point for developing comparisons, the full range of data needs considering rather than an overfocus on commercialisation and IP. Excellence in different types of KE should be encouraged - as the assessment of HEIF highlighted³.
24. Therefore, there should be recognition in the metrics of the value of broader non-traditional KE activities that non-HEIF institutions, in particular, have invested in, during the five years when infrastructure funding was not available.
25. We would cautiously accept the principle of clustering institutions for benchmarking purposes; however, this clustering should be self-directed, with suitable guidance from HEFCE/ Research England.
26. If clustering is to be developed, we would be opposed to a ranking system for KE as it could discourage collaboration and encourage competition between HEPs.

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

27. HE-BCI data is very valuable in assessing the state of KE performance across the UK and regions and monitoring activities carried out.
28. However, it is important to remember that such a survey cannot be a true proxy for socioeconomic impact achieved - that is a much more complex process.
29. Other data about KE can be found in HEPs' annual reports. Incorporating this existing data (including narrative) into an annual KEF exercise would be a logical addition.
30. As KONFER continues to be developed, this could also provide rich sources of data that could be included within the KEF. However, we would recommend that this is considered for later versions of KEF.
31. It would be also worth looking at existing models for measuring public engagement (which the broader definition of KE could include). For example, the Edge Tool developed by NCCPE.

5. What new (or not currently collected) data might be useful to such a framework?

32. We cross-reference the NCCPE's submission and highlight the following measures:
 - Make up of governing bodies (community representation; E&D)

³ See page 16, Coates Ulrichsen, T (2015), Assessing the Economic Impacts of the Higher Education Innovation Fund, HEFCE

- Staff (academic and professional) acting as trustees or in other governance capacities in external civil society organisations
 - Number of community / voluntary sector organisations supported by student volunteers / placements
 - Investment in brokerage / opening up university assets to community
 - Community interaction – attendance at events; exhibitions
 - Public involvement in research – advisory groups; other investment
 - Community take up of skills and capacity building
33. In addition, it would be beneficial to provide further information on engagement with LEPs and local councils.
34. We would also suggest that information on HEI involvement in networks is included in further versions of the KEF. Capturing the wide range of local, regional and national networks that staff and institutions are activities involved in would help to develop a fuller picture of the ecosystems in which HEPs are generating knowledge through.
35. Building upon this, examples of co-production with industry should be included. This is something that many small and specialist HEPs undertake. This involves a variety of activities including academic staff, students and professionals working together to support a mix of student projects/learning/research development and dissemination/R&D.
36. We are concerned, however, about the dangers of bombarding partners, members of the public etc with requests for feedback so that we can ‘evidence’ that events have made impact or led to change. Hence there are not only ‘costs’ in terms of time in gathering evidence but also balancing between that cost and its usefulness. Further careful consideration is needed.

Examples of diverse KE from small and specialist institutions

37. Small and specialist higher education providers are found throughout the UK and engage in a broad range KE activity that cannot always be fully captured by the HE-BCI survey. A provider might, for example, be working at a SME level where income to the HEP may not particular high.
38. We would reference the [Innovation Systems and the Role of the of Small and Specialist Institutions](#) and the [Landex Research with Impact website](#) for further, fuller case studies than those highlighted below.
39. Some examples of KE:
- a. **Bradford College** is currently engaged in work on race-relations, of importance both to the local community and wider society and something that the University of Bradford is not focusing on. Activities [include a conference in April](#).
 - b. **Harper Adams University**. Harper is the only major employer in its part of Shropshire and is also world-leading in terms of its research (eg it recently led on the first successful Hands-Free Hectare project). Many of their students come from the local farming community so by its nature it is serving local skills need. In addition, it is a key partner in the new Agri-Epi centre which aims to bring small SMEs into the farming supply chain (amongst other things). More information on it at <https://www.agri-epicentre.com/>
 - c. **Norwich University of the Arts**. NUA has been working in partnership with the local council through redeveloping various council buildings. This has involved the creation of a sector specific business incubation programme enabling micro-businesses to start in a supported manner, growing the Norwich cluster. Much of this programme is open to and delivered by digital creative businesses in the city.

- d. A researcher at **Falmouth University** has undertaken work to redesign lobster pots with a company in Padstow, demonstrating the cross-linkages university practical KE can have within its local region to fulfil a local challenge. This has the potential for scale up to the rest of the lobster industry nationally and internationally.
- e. **The University of Worcester** worked in partnership with Worcestershire County Council to plan and build The Hive, Europe's first joint city centre university and public library and history and customer centre for students and the public. The ongoing effects of KE through developing community cohesion are ongoing; yet hard to put a financial value on.

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

- 40. To ensure that KEF metrics are visualised in simple, transparent and useful ways, careful consideration of audiences is needed.
- 41. In a world of information overload and time-poor professionals, we value short, sharp and useful forms of presentation, adapted accordingly.
- 42. One potential tool could be to use simple spider diagrams that highlight the sort of activities an HEI specialises in (perhaps similar to ones used in the HEIF assessment and simplified versions of those found in the University Alliance report "The Hidden Story"⁴).
- 43. Another potential tool to allow those to engage better from outside HE could be through using Theory of Change methodology to demonstrate how HEPs and others can work together within an ecosystem to address particular challenges.
- 44. This said, it is clear that different sectors will require different methods of visualisation. For HEI-HEI, simple, interactive spreadsheets may work well. However, potential partners in the nonprofit sector, for example, may require something quick and easy to understand - what are the main areas that an HEI specialises in? Do they have a focus on local challenges? And who have they worked with before?
- 45. Similarly, SME and large business may require different information which in turn differs from what a local authority may want.
- 46. We must ask our partners from their respective sectors what methods of communication make most sense for them. HEPs and HEFCE are not best placed to decide what these methods will be must ask other users what they want - we cannot dictate what will work.

7. Any other comments?

Whilst we appreciate that this consultation is primarily about the metrics used within a KEF exercise, we believe that it is essential that some broader points are considered. GuildHE therefore recommends that the following be considered in the development of the KEF:

- 1. We note that HEFCE is considering that the KEF looks at both levels of activity and performance of HEPs. As such, HEFCE/Research England must consider the full diversity of sector and the

⁴ Williams et al (2017), The Hidden Story: Understanding knowledge exchange partnerships with the creative economy, University Alliance

different types of providers found within it. The fullest range of KE activities undertaken must be considered when developing the KEF.

2. The metrics used must be broad enough to recognise this and we would argue that qualitative information will be needed to supplement existing data, particularly to report on social returns.
3. If the KEF is to act in part as a performance management tool, then any funding associated with it must not disqualify institutions based upon size and location. That principle does not apply in TEF or REF.
 - a. For that reason, it would be unfair to develop an exercise that did not take account of the fact that institutions that receive HEIF have an automatic advantage through having greater capacity to develop and deliver KE activity.
 - b. In particular, the removal of the HEIF allocation threshold is essential. The system is unfair, impacts negatively upon the student experience, and unreasonably inhibits the capacity of small and specialist institutions to contribute to economic growth.
4. We argued in our response to the Industrial Strategy Green paper consultation that investing in capacity and collaboration across the whole of the research system will result in economic and social growth through the very fact that people with different views and skills are encouraged to participate. For example, the DFID-ESRC Growth Research Programme defines policy impact in part as “enduring connectivity: impacts on the existence and strengths of networks of people and organisations who understand and can make use of research.”⁵
5. Acknowledging the importance of and enabling such relationships to be developed will lead to economic success over time. GuildHE could assist in nurturing such a network.⁶
6. Building on this, we argue KEF offers the chance to be experimental in developing new funding interventions. A small element of funding could be used to directly support small and specialists HEI engaging in KE given that they are closely aligned to their communities and have lost ground to make up following the reduction in HEIF funding.
 - a. Furthermore, to do this, funding calls for collaborations could be developed where a small or specialist in an area must be the lead institution. This would help to build capacity and experience.
7. In common with University Alliance, we believe the KEF should be rolled out cautiously, possibly in stages. There is no simple path to implementation and the timescales set out by government, with Autumn 2018 in mind, are highly ambitious. A non-assessed pilot in year one might provide the answer.

Matthew Guest
Policy Manager
Knowledge Exchange & Industrial Strategy
matthew.guest@guildhe.ac.uk

⁵ Growth Research Programme (2016), Achieving policy impact

⁶ See the GuildHE response to the Industrial Strategy Green Paper for further information (pgs3-7 in particular): <https://www.guildhe.ac.uk/blog/industrial-strategy-green-paper-response/>