



Monday, 06 July 2015

## **HEFCE Call for Evidence of Good Practice in Knowledge Exchange GuildHE Response**

GuildHE is one of the two recognised representative bodies for higher education institutions in the UK. Our membership comprises smaller, specialist, and ethos-led institutions which are regionally focussed and have a strong tradition of teaching, widening participation, translational research, business and third-sector engagement, and research-led curricula. Their specialisms are diverse, from creative arts, design, performance and media, to land-based subjects and agricultural science, from theology and the humanities, to education and teacher training. Amongst our members we have some of the leading institutions in these specialisms; all are engaged in myriad ways with the communities beyond the campus. This response highlights key case studies of exceptional practice in Knowledge Exchange from our membership.

### **Existing guidance, how-to-guides, templates or benchmarking tools that have proved useful in KE activities**

Smaller and specialist institutions have the benefit of being nimble, dynamic, and therefore able to respond to opportunities as they arise, thanks to their near-to-market and industry-leading position; for example many lecturers in art and design colleges are currently active in their industries, and bring students into direct contact with the 'real-world' through these connections.

Through our recent research and report with the OECD LEED<sup>1</sup> programme '[Innovation Systems and the role of small and specialist higher education institutions](#)'<sup>2</sup> we identified that much of the innovation and knowledge exchange with industry and society was embedded in the daily practice of these institutions; it is a natural extension of what they teach and how they conduct their, largely applied, research. This is well exemplified by the toolkits and guides produced by Southampton Solent University Enterprise team, submitted separately to this call by Prof. Richard Blackwell, Assistant Vice-Chancellor (Strategy) at Solent. As Richard emphasises in his submission, 'these materials, seen in a broader context, are part of a developing trend for the teaching and learning function to contribute to knowledge exchange, adding value to the success already achieved through mobilising research for KE. These linkages and impacts have been created at Solent by strategic commitment and deliberate action.'

As part of the '[Innovation systems](#)' report we produced a 'Project Design Template for Higher Education Institutions'<sup>3</sup>, a broad crib sheet of prompts to help researchers and university business engagement managers capture data about projects as

<sup>1</sup> Local Economic and Employment Development programme:

<http://www.oecd.org/employment/leed/>

<sup>2</sup> Brockhurst, R., Miller, A. and Westwood, A., *Innovation Systems and the role of small and specialist higher education institutions*, GuildHE, 2014. Available open access on the Issuu Platform: [http://issuu.com/guildhecrest/docs/crest\\_innovation\\_systems\\_single\\_pa](http://issuu.com/guildhecrest/docs/crest_innovation_systems_single_pa)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. pp.292-295

opportunities emerge, with an ultimate goal of being able to measure the extent of change for partners and users as a result of such activities.

#### *Guidance via networks*

GuildHE has been successful in developing an active and well regarded research network, [CREST - Consortium for Research, Excellence, and Training](#), originally funded by HEFCE and since 2013 a stand-alone membership-funded group of 22 institutions<sup>4</sup>. While CREST has not produced any formal how-to guides or toolkits for knowledge exchange, it acts as an invaluable opportunity for research directors and managers to share experiences and best practice, to network and collaborate in generating ideas and developing shared resources. CREST organises an Annual Summer School to bring together new and early stage researchers from across the network. The event is very much geared towards research in a broader context, and researchers' engagement with other sectors, industry, and the public as a vital facet of a contemporary research career. This notion - that early stage researchers should be encouraged to engage with industry and be recognised for effective collaboration skills - has been recently supported by the Dowling Review.

In further recognition of the increasing importance of Knowledge Exchange and allied areas, and the need to liaise across institutional roles (i.e. research, innovation, teaching and learning, enterprise and employability roles) to develop skills and capabilities to achieve effective practice, such as articulating the full spectrum of activity via HEBCI and other channels, CREST has since formalised provision of support through a new network, IEKE - Innovation, Enterprise and Knowledge Exchange. By sharing best practice to develop nuanced understandings of these areas, the network will help smaller and specialist institutions more fully and effectively articulate the full spectrum of excellent activities they deliver in the KE, enterprise, business-interaction, and innovation domains to meet current policy frameworks (i.e. HEBCIS, REF) and those proposed for the future.

We would like to stress the vital creativity and innovation that occurs through network effects, and that such opportunities to share between and across institutions with varying strengths in a collegiate manner should not be any less valued as a mechanism for developing thinking around and generating ideas for KE as toolkits and guides. In the context of a proposed framework for KE, we would welcome support of such initiatives, where all actors in HE and FE are embraced as valued leaders, participants, and collaborators, and in which diverse organisational roles are engaged to develop a holistic view of potential KE activity.

#### **Initiatives or approaches to KE that are respected as innovative or particularly effective**

With such a variety of members, we can only aim here to provide some indication of projects and case studies which we feel HEFCE would benefit from considering in the context of this call. We have tried to ensure data on these case studies is available elsewhere in more detail and have indicated the source where this is the case.

#### *Art, Design, Media and Performance*

Student start-up initiatives and incubators are a common feature in art and design specialist institutions. At Norwich University of the Arts the student- and staff-led consultancy, ideasfactory, has achieved accolades in the field for its innovative

---

<sup>4</sup> For a full list of members see: <http://www.crest.ac.uk/member>

approach to industry interaction. ideasfactory offers a vital connection to real-world projects, with staff, students and businesses benefitting from the exchange in a highly competitive sector where siloing knowledge and innovation in the university is to the detriment of a relevant curriculum and a cutting-edge creative sector. ideasfactory is outlined in more detail in the NUA submission to HEFCE as part of this call and was included in ['Innovation Systems'](#) (pp.207-213).

Southampton Solent University, whilst a broader based institution, also offers specialist training in creative subjects and in recent years has taken significant strategic steps to embed 'real-world' business interaction and start-up support in its creative programmes. The university was in the top 20 for start-ups in the last 2 HEBCI surveys. This success flows from the creation of a supportive ecosystem, involving some mainstream curriculum units on start-up (e.g. freelancing in Creative Industries), support for pitching for seed corn money, external business mentors, a dedicated alumni network and some incubation space. In addition there is some modest investment in staff and seed corn money utilising HEIF. A case study on Solent Creatives has been submitted separately to HEFCE as part of this call and was also included in ['Innovation Systems'](#) (pp.70-84).

It is important to acknowledge that the arts institutions also have much to offer social goals beyond business imperatives and embracing the latest technology. Transparent Boundaries, a European project, led by Professor Lesley Millar at University for the Creative Arts used lace-making and craft skills as the basis for exploring why older generations are largely absent from contemporary culture and media. The project was recently shortlisted for a Times Higher Education Leadership and Management Award for Knowledge Exchange, and was featured on the [GuildHE blog](#). It is an excellent example of where arts, and the humanities more broadly, can offer creative insights into and new perspectives on social issues and 'grand challenges', and in this specific case, provide a far more positive and constructive viewpoint to an often problematised issue - ageing. Full details of the project are on the [Transparent Boundaries website](#).

As Transparent Boundaries has shown, performance practices are a powerful tool for communicating and exploring experiences, and has much to offer in broadening our understanding of and empathy with health, wellbeing, and social issues. Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (RCSSD) academic Dr Catherine McNamara has applied theatre practices to issues of identity and diversity in transgender drama research, enabling young people to explore social and personal challenges and using performance to develop their own voice. This activity has resulted in a Community Interest Company and represents an alternative perspective on the traditional KT 'spin-out'. A case study featuring the project was submitted to HEFCE as part of the call for qualitative evidence of KE in January 2015.

#### *Natural and Applied Sciences, Agriculture and Land-Based Subjects*

Specialist institutions in land-based subjects bear some similarity to their counterparts in the creative industry. Lecturers and academics are frequently engaged in practice, and have close ties to industry which informs and benefits from their teaching and research. At University of Worcester, the specialised research centre NPARU - National Pollen and Aerobiology Research Unit offers an excellent example of 'hard' science being translated and applied to real-time issues and industry practice. NPARU delivers the National Pollen Count for the MET Office, and through a commercial service, provides Allergy Testing and certification for the

marketplace. NPARU was included as a case study in '[Innovation Systems](#)' (pp.243-253).

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is perhaps a natural route for knowledge exchange for specialist institutions. Delivering CPD in the KE context provides opportunities for curriculum diversification and innovation for the institution, and a nuanced, specialised knowledge base for partner organisations and their employees delivered by experts at the cutting edge of practice. In recent years Royal Agricultural University have developed bespoke training courses for the civil service - Defra, supermarkets and food distributors - Morrisons, and the banking industry - Lloyds Bank. RAU have previously submitted this as a case study to HEFCE as part of the call for qualitative evidence of KE.

GuildHE institutions are also at the cutting edge of scientific research, with significant KE / KT activities in partnership with policy makers and industry. RAU's Centre for Research Translation aims to further agricultural research translation to inform and direct policy; Harper Adams University have developed the Precision Farming Institute with significant industry involvement to provide the UK agricultural sector with innovations in agri-tech ([Innovation Systems](#), pp.193-203); and through applying human-centred design approaches to technological challenges, the University of Chichester have worked with a variety of defence and rescue organisations to refine and develop vital improvements in high speed marine craft which will deliver major benefits to the armed services, rescue services and marine industries. The latter project is detailed in GuildHE's '[Excellence in Diversity](#)' report<sup>5</sup> (p.40) and the REF impact case study database.

#### *Health, Wellbeing and Ageing*

Health and wellbeing are major agendas to which GuildHE institutions offer significant insights. Through the Association for Dementia Studies (ADS), University of Worcester researchers have led major European projects looking at the grand challenge of caring for an ageing population, and are at the forefront of tackling the growing need of effective dementia and Alzheimer's treatment. The ADS has successful partnerships with local and regional health authorities and deliver a suite of CPD for care professionals, influencing policy making for this grand challenge. Their work is highlighted in '[Innovation Systems](#)' (pp.230-242).

Inter- and cross-disciplinary activities characterise smaller and specialist institutions. KE often occurs at boundaries with other disciplines, such as science and health care. Theatre practitioners and researchers at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (RCSSD) have worked with carers and victims of abuse to explore the issue of sexual abuse, developing a new method of addressing trauma and communicating experience. This project, submitted to HEFCE in response to the qualitative KE call and described in 'Excellence in Diversity' (p. 37), is a useful illustration of how creative practices can illuminate other domains of knowledge with new insights.

#### *Humanities and Social Sciences*

Although not a project from a GuildHE member, we would like to highlight the [evaluation of CinBA \(Creativity and Craft Production in Middle and Late Bronze Age](#)

---

<sup>5</sup> Kleiman, P., *Excellence in Diversity*, GuildHE, 2015. Accessed at <http://www.guildhe.ac.uk/blog/excellence-in-diversity-a-report-celebrating-the-diversity-of-uk-higher-education/>

[Europe](#))<sup>6</sup>, a project which a GuildHE Policy Adviser was seconded to complete earlier this year. This evaluative assessment of the impact, leverage and effectiveness of a pan-European humanities research project, funded by HERA, has received excellent feedback and draws useful conclusions for the implementation of successful Knowledge Exchange initiatives in the creative arts and humanities.

### *Education and pedagogy*

GuildHE institutions have teaching at their core, with many delivering teacher training, CPD and research into education and pedagogy. Pedagogical innovation is one of the key ways in which the learning from KE activities is brought back into the institution; partnerships are leveraged to the benefit of the students, and the relevant and current industry experience of academic staff is greatly valued by them<sup>7</sup>. Again, much of this is central to the way in which these institutions deliver courses, and we would argue that, when considering the beneficiaries of KE, students are recognised as vital recipients and participants in KE - indeed they will have been a vital component to many if not all the projects listed above. Furthermore, in the cases of developing CPD for allied industries, institutions have diversified courses as a result of KE and created new curricula for current and future students. A tangible example of KE in pedagogy development comes from the University of Worcester, where a computing academic drew on his passion and experience of teaching to deliver stimulating game-based teaching tools for the teaching of STEM subjects, enabling teachers to embrace digital learning. The project is detailed in 'Excellence in Diversity' (p.43).

### **Esteem or success indicators that identify the value and impact of a KE activity**

Indicators of success used by GuildHE institutions vary by the subject area / industry in which the activity has taken place. Submissions from our members indicate success indicators in more detail; some commonly in use are listed below.

Those in the creative industries, where recognition and reputation are key to winning and retaining business, success for KE users, who are frequently businesses or student entrepreneurs, is often indicated through awards and similar industry accolades, such as Deutsche Bank Creative Business Awards. It may also be relevant to look at ongoing exhibitions of work, additional funding to extend practices, or the offer of new exhibition opportunities / curation of work into other configurations.

In industries such as agriculture where global policy making has swift and large effects on business practices enacting a shift in perspective or policy change is a major indicator of successful engagement. Here we see specialist institutions in direct contact with Defra, for example, to inform and engage policymakers through practice to demonstrate better methods or refine policies.

Leverage of additional resources is a useful indicator of success, whether these are financial or in-kind, where these benefits would not have accrued without participation in the KE activity. It is important to recognise that leverage is not always financial, as the offer of space, time, access to a network, or professional mentoring

---

<sup>6</sup> Creativity and Craft Production in Middle to Late Bronze Age Europe (CinBA) - Assessing the impact of a HERA research project. Accessed at: [https://www.academia.edu/13204696/Creativity\\_and\\_Craft\\_Production\\_in\\_Middle\\_and\\_Late\\_Bronze\\_Age\\_Europe\\_CinBA\\_Assessing\\_the\\_Impact\\_of\\_a\\_HERA\\_Research\\_Project](https://www.academia.edu/13204696/Creativity_and_Craft_Production_in_Middle_and_Late_Bronze_Age_Europe_CinBA_Assessing_the_Impact_of_a_HERA_Research_Project)

<sup>7</sup> As identified in the Hepi assessment of student satisfaction and highlighted on the GuildHE website: <http://www.guildhe.ac.uk/blog/guildhe-institutions-deliver-outstanding-student-satisfaction-says-independent-research/>

can have significant ongoing impact, especially where social and community goals are concerned.

Where the impact has a more social aspect, such as in health care, success indicators are tied to patient or user experience feedback. In the case of Worcester Dementia and Abuse research centres, the indicator here is the adoption of recommendations into care practice, resulting in a change of service delivery.

We would also recognise the incorporation of KE outputs and experiences into curricula and the student experience as an indicator of successful exchange. This absorption of the outcomes of the activity represents an important part of the feedback loop which develops academic practice, both in terms of research and teaching, and which maintains the relevancy of interaction with partners. Current research into learning gain - including that being undertaken by HEFCE - may be useful in generating potential measures for success.

#### *Concluding remarks*

For smaller and specialist institutions we identify a number of risks associated with a proposed framework for KE and we would like to take the opportunity to highlight them here. Much KE activity requires a certain degree of freedom in decision making and creative thinking in order to materialise; such activity and partnerships frequently come about in the initial stages through individuals rather than institutions or systems. A framework approach may therefore have a prescriptive effect on future KE, potentially curtailing more innovative and unusual prospects that arise from cross- and inter-disciplinary collaborations. We would advise against implementing a framework which represents an additional administrative burden on institutions, especially those which have less capacity to incorporate an additional layer of reporting or information gathering. We would also welcome mitigation against an overemphasis on income generating activities to the detriment of those with more social and community benefits, and a recognition that the financial benefits accruable from industries dominated by micro businesses and SMEs, such as the creative industries, are not comparable to those with far more numerous and larger entities, such as STEM. Finally we urge recognition of the role teaching and learning can have in KE, particularly with regard to students as actors, participants, beneficiaries, and collaborators.

Overall, we would like to stress the need for a holistic view of the value and impact of KE activities that looks beyond easily quantifiable metrics to qualitative outcomes. Any Knowledge Exchange Framework and attendant assessment criteria should allow for and embrace a broad spectrum of indicators of change for *both* the users *and* the initiators of these activities.

Rachel Brockhurst, Policy Adviser (Enterprise & Knowledge Exchange) and CREST Network Officer, GuildHE  
[Rachel.brockhurst@guildhe.ac.uk](mailto:Rachel.brockhurst@guildhe.ac.uk)