

# Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF)

## Note on the relevance and use of UKRI Research Council data

### Background

Research England (RE) has been tasked to develop a Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) to evaluate and benchmark the contribution UK Higher Education Providers make to the exploitation (in its broader sense, not solely commercial) of the knowledge they generate.<sup>1</sup>

As defined by RE, the purposes of the KEF are to provide:

- Universities with new tools to understand, benchmark and improve their individual performance.
- Businesses and other collaborators or users with more information on universities' individual strengths in KE.
- Greater public visibility and accountability of university KE activities.

Since the KEF aims to benchmark and compare universities' performance in KE, it is important that the metrics collected are *fair* (their use allows for a fair comparison between institutions), *informative* (metrics are related to KE activities and say something useful about them) and *linked to performance in KE* (not just a reflection of the scale of activity, or resources available).

Guided partly by the responses to the call for evidence, the KEF team have examined a wide variety of data and information on knowledge exchange activities collected from various sources, including those gathered within URKI. In establishing which metrics and perspectives to take forward as part of the KEF, the team applied the following tests to the data:

- **Useful:** data are informative and say something useful about KE activity.
- **Robust:** data are from reliable sources, collected to high standards.
- **Universal:** data are relevant or applicable to most institutions expected to take part in the KEF, paying particular regard to RE being asked to design a KEF the whole of the UK could participate in if they wished.
- **Timely:** the collection of the data is consistent and recurring – i.e. not one-off or very infrequent.
- **Specific:** data are specific enough so that they relate directly to the actions/strategies enacted by universities in KE.

The KEF team considered two data sources from UKRI Research Councils – Research Council grant funding to institutions, and research outcomes as disclosed by researchers to Researchfish®.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://re.ukri.org/documents/2017/jo-johnson-to-david-sweeney/>

While both sets of data are openly accessible via the Gateway to Research portal (GtR)<sup>2</sup>, produced on a regular basis, and have been useful in informing the broader development of the KEF, we consider that the data contained in these two sources is not suitable to form the basis of main KEF metrics at this time.

### **Research Council grant funding**

Compared to the 125 higher education institutions funded by Research England, Research Council funding is awarded via a competitive process to support both fundamental and applied research, and its exploitation. The competitive nature of the funding means it is necessarily concentrated on a relatively small number of organisations (including research institutes or centres). As an example, 75% of BBSRC research grant funding is distributed to 20 research organisations across the UK (including Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).<sup>3</sup>

When comparing the list of the top 25 research organisations **across the UK** (by value) receiving research funding from each of the 7 Research Councils for FY2016-17:

- 59 (49 in England) unique research organisations received funding from at least one Research Council.
- Only 38 (31 in England) research organisations received funding from at least five Research Councils.
- 24 (21 in England) research organisations received funding from all seven Research Councils.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the grant data itself says little about KE activity specifically (for example, it is not straightforward to classify grants into 'fundamental' or 'applied') and therefore is not suitable for the purposes of the main KEF metrics.

However, UKRI Research Council data has informed the KEF clustering exercise, although in this case, the data source was the HESA finance record, which includes grant income from Research Councils as well as other grant funding sources, for completeness.

### **Researchfish® Data**

Researchers in receipt of Research Council funding have to report outputs and outcomes of their research annually using the online reporting tool Researchfish®<sup>5</sup>. Whilst reporting against each research grant is compulsory for researchers, the level of detail provided varies. Although entries on the research outcomes portal are very informative in understanding the KE activities undertaken by researchers, due to their largely self-reported nature, we do not currently consider them robust enough to inform core KEF metrics. In addition, considering that concentration of Research Council grants outlined above, the reports of outputs and outcomes from research grants is similarly concentrated, meaning the data does not have universal coverage.

However, while these UKRI Research Council datasets cannot be used directly as main KEF metrics at this time, this data might be used in other ways – for example, to help normalise and compare institutions in a given cluster, or as a valuable source of supporting evidence in any narrative elements of the KEF.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://gtr.ukri.org/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://bbsrc.ukri.org/about/spending/>

<sup>4</sup> UKRI Research Grants 16/17 by commitment value

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.researchfish.net/>