

Knowledge Exchange Plan

2022 - 2027

Context

Our Mission

Our University's mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. Knowledge Exchange (KE) and Knowledge Transfer (KT) are important to this mission because it ensures our research has an impact outside of our University and invites external partners to shape our future. Within our University Strategy for 2022 to 2027, entitled '**Learn and Live**', we state our goal to enhance our societal impact through research, enterprise, and skills development. Our KE Plan aims to help our University enhance societal impact through external partnerships founded on our research and scholarship.

Defining Knowledge Exchange and Transfer

KE and KT cover a wide range of activities across all our faculties and nations, and in providing a definition there is no intention to restrict that range. We define KE as:

a two-way collaboration between academics and various, external partners or publics, with the aim of sharing and co-producing evidence, insights, technologies, intellectual property, experiences, and skills.

KT is:

a one-way process in which our University provides knowledge and intellectual property to a customer or partner.

Our definition of KE has evolved from the work of The Open University's Public Engagement with Research Catalyst, **An Open Research University**, which resulted in a Senate-approved definition of 'engaged research', to:

encompass the different ways that Open University (OU) staff meaningfully interact with various 'publics'¹ over any or all stages of a research and/or engagement process, from issue formulation, the production or co-creation of new knowledge and/or outputs, to knowledge/output evaluation and dissemination.

¹ 'Publics' may include user communities, citizens, institutional actors, NGOs, representatives from economic or societal entities, and/or groups who pre-exist, come into existence or develop an identity in relationship to the research process.

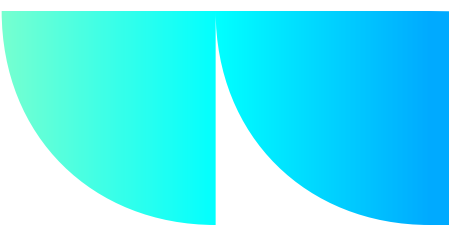




Benefits of Knowledge Exchange and Transfer

KE and KT have many benefits for our students and staff, our partners and broader society because it helps to translate research and scholarship into new opportunities and impacts.

- For staff, KE and KT can help fulfil career ambitions to see research and scholarship have positive effects beyond our University and can open new routes for research. Our promotion routes also recognise KE as a pathway to career progression.
- For our students, at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, involvement in KE can enhance career opportunities, open opportunities to establish new commercial or social enterprises, and places their learning and research in context beyond academia.
- For the entire university community, KE and KT can create new income streams, increase our share of Quality Research (QR) and Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) grant funding, and lead to job creation through new spin-out and start-up companies.



External landscape

KE and Research Impact are driving funding initiatives within the UK Government and higher education settings. The external landscape is changing rapidly. Our KE Plan must allow us to respond to change, align with UK (including devolved administrations) and international priorities, and adapt to the insights afforded us by our collaborators. The KE Plan has been informed by the UK Government KE agenda:

England: The **KE Framework (KEF)** and the **KE Concordat (KEC)** are mechanisms by which Research England aim to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the use of public funding for KE and further a culture of continuous improvement in universities.

Wales: In February 2022, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) refreshed its **Research and Innovation Vision for Wales**. The vision includes a desire to cultivate a strong sense of place where research responds to local challenges and engages local communities to create new solutions.

Scotland: The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) supports KE through the University Innovation Fund (UIF), which is generally focused on the key priorities reflected in Scotland's programme for Government.

Ireland: The Open University in Ireland is a member of the Connected partnership, a bespoke Northern Ireland programme to facilitate better engagement among industry, further education and higher education.

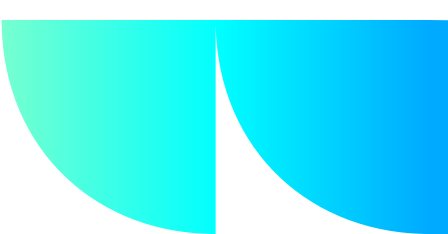
This Plan also responds to the challenges and opportunities created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Open University (OU) is a leader in open, online and distance learning. We aim to create new and equitable ways of collaborating that take advantage of the uptake of technology, increase in remote working and new, flexible ways of working as a result of the pandemic.

Current scale and strengths.

The OU engages in a significant breadth of KE and KT activity, including tech transfer, policy influence, engaged research, joint PhD supervision and public engagement. Engagement ranges from the broad impact and reach via OpenLearn and our BBC partnership to the deep impact of smaller scale, focused engagement, e.g., with one person NGOs. We recognise that public engagement has value to the OU outside KE and KT, and the KE Plan focuses on public engagement that is directly related or resulting from OU research.

The presence of the OU in all UK nations provides targeted opportunities for high-value KE and the work of The OU in Wales (OUiW) is an example of this strength. The OUiW develops place-based, research-led community engagement programmes co-designed with local partners and communities in order to deliver positive economic and social outcomes to all areas of Wales, including the most marginalised communities. In doing so, we demonstrate our values of inclusivity, innovation, and responsiveness, working with partners in further and higher education, and with the public, third, and private sectors, to ensure our innovation and engagement activities achieve reach and significance.

Our commercial KE (income) is monitored by the Higher Education-Business & Community Interaction (HE-BCI) survey and has remained relatively static over the past few years. This assessment of commercial and community focused KE delivers direct benefits to our University with funding allocated to England (Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF)) and Wales (Research Wales Innovation Fund (RWIF) £500k) based on our HE-BCI performance to the value of over £1.3M per annum. In addition, the OU in Scotland received £313k through the University Innovation Fund (UIF) for KE activities in Scotland for 2021/22. The OU in Ireland currently receives £120k from the annual HEIF NI pot of £4m.



Activities

In overview, our planned activities will support the delivery of engaged research, social, community or cultural engagement and achieve impact; capitalise on our presence in all nations of the UK and help students and alumni to start businesses.

The Knowledge Exchange Plan will focus on five activities:

Activity 1: Student, Alumni and Staff Entrepreneurship

Activity 2: Commercial Knowledge Transfer

Activity 3: Knowledge Exchange for Research Impact

Activity 4: Knowledge Exchange and Knowledge Transfer across the Nations

Activity 5: Improving Our Processes

The OU is engaged in a large breadth of KE and KT activity. The KE plan has focused in on five key areas that can focus resources to help us deliver our KEC Action Plan, complement the Research Plan and Research Excellence Framework (REF) ambitions and build on our strengths to deliver differing national priorities for KE.



Activity 1: Student, Alumni and Staff Entrepreneurship

Purpose

Data from the OU's 2017 Market Sizing and Learner profile study shows that 15% of those either currently or intending to learn at HE level via distance learning on a part-time basis strongly agreed with the statement 'I would like to start my own business venture'. Among ethnic minority respondents the figure rises to 32%. Data from the Graduate Outcome survey for the 2018/19 OU cohort showed 6% of respondents were running their own business, self-employed or freelancing. Yet, our current entrepreneurial resources and activity are underutilised and focus on start-ups (commercial and social enterprise). OpenLearn and other platforms already host material, but by enhancing and promoting our provision, we can nurture an innovation culture at the OU that attracts new students, increases our students' entrepreneurial capabilities, and supports the most promising OU affiliated start-ups.

Outcomes

Once we have established a baseline for demand, we will set targets for:

- The number of students engaging in our entrepreneurial activity
- The number of student and staff start-ups reported in HE-BCI
- Increases in self-employment activity (evidence from Graduate Outcomes survey (HESA) at 15-month post completion of study and Employability of Qualifiers Survey (OU) - three years after completion).

Mechanisms

- **Establish Open Business Creators (OBC)**, a high-profile accelerator programme across the UK that validates, nurtures, and helps new business thrive. Via an interconnected, complementary offer across the four nations, we will: deliver training; host annual entrepreneurial competitions; support business modelling; and help students, alumni and staff navigate investment and development opportunities. OBC will facilitate links with existing national programmes to access external funding and expertise for growth. (e.g., Zinc, Nesta, Innovate UK, Local Growth funds) and establish a mentorship programme for student and staff entrepreneurs by utilising our extensive alumni network and a cohort of 'entrepreneurs in residence'. We will grow our ability to incentivise and invest in OU-affiliated start-ups by working with existing partners (e.g., Santander) and seeking new external investment, philanthropic or venture capital.
- **Explore development of an OU incubator** that provides physical and virtual space for student, staff and external start-ups and scale ups. A creative and collaborative space that allows ideation and creation of new activity. OU staff and students will benefit from the potential interactions with these organisations, while the businesses benefit from OU expertise.
- **Create a virtual Hub for entrepreneurial activity**, providing a single home for all training content and associated resources to help students, alumni and staff get the support they need. The hub will signpost students to the most appropriate resources, be they local or national schemes, and support relevant to the breadth of student interest (e.g., business creation, freelance/self-employed skill needs).

Activity 2: Commercial Knowledge Transfer

Purpose

We will support the growth of commercial income from KE activities aligned to the HE-BCI survey to drive income and increase our KE allocations (HEIF and RWIF) for subsequent reinvestment in KE Plan activities. To achieve this, we will unlock new opportunities and mechanisms to engage with businesses and facilitate innovation, initially focusing support on areas of strength before looking into new areas for growth. We will capitalise on the use of our expertise and facilities through the increased provision of services.

Outcomes

We will set targets for:

- The amount of income received from external innovation funding sources
- The growth in income reported in the annual HE-BCI return.

Mechanisms

- **Grow commercial services, external partners, and innovation funding** to increase HEIF and RWIF and foster new collaborative partnerships. We will support the establishment of new relationships, nurture and build existing partnerships and facilitate external income generation. Activity will include building on existing strengths (e.g., CPD and consultancy) and new ventures such as collaboration with the Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) to establish a 'Laboratory Services Unit' to promote and manage commercial use of STEM facilities.
Opportunities that may arise via Shared Prosperity Funding, regional skills funding and City and Growth deals will be explored to maximise their benefit and meet local agenda needs.
- **Encourage innovation through supporting KE in areas of strength**, initially focus on Space and Edtech before using these as models to support emerging areas of strength. We will develop the commercial potential of our intellectual property (IP) and increase income from external innovation funding sources. This includes supporting the formation of new commercial partnerships with organisations aligned to areas of strength.
- **Improve our capacity and capabilities to deliver commercial activity** by delivering commercialisation training for academics, support staff and students. We will create a diverse pipeline of opportunities through targeted support of early career researchers and under-represented groups. We will ensure continued improvement of service to stakeholders through creation of a knowledge bank to capture and analyse feedback and implement changes.



Activity 3: Knowledge Exchange for Impact

Purpose

KE, particularly that focused on engaged research and KT are excellent pathways to impact and is a route for making our research and teaching useful and meaningful to society in both the long and short term. To enhance the impact of our research we will help interdisciplinary teams to set out realistic impact pathways for open societal challenges (**Activity 1 of Research Plan**) and support communication to meaningfully engage with publics.

Outcomes

We will set targets for:

- An impact action plan that provides strategies for individual UoAs to increase the number of case studies eligible for REF submission
- Increase the number of high quality (reach and significance) impact case studies eligible for REF submission
- Create an evidence capture system and associated support that delivers archived evidence of impact over the full REF cycle.

Mechanisms

- **Review of Impact Case Studies** for each REF Unit of Assessment (UoA) to understand which UoAs need to develop a broader pool of research to deliver the required REF Impact needs and which case studies that were listed as reserves for the REF2021 exercise can be further developed.
- **Increase our impact potential through supporting and developing KE activities of strength** such as policy engagement (incl. PolicyWISE), public engagement and citizen science. Utilise our growing pool of senior KE academics and professional support staff to share good practice and embed KE/KT into external funding applications.
- **Support the establishment of external partnerships** that can deliver engaged research that address Open Societal Challenges (OSC) and achieve impact. We will create project plans for our OSC projects that set out realistic pathways to impact.



Activity 4: Knowledge Exchange across the Nations

Purpose

The OU has a unique strength in being a UK wide university and we undertake KE and KT across the UK, with each nation having differing KE strengths. Each nation receives KE income and must respond to different national KE priorities with small professional teams and a finite number of academics. We wish to work together as a mechanism for delivering local plans and growing KE and KT.

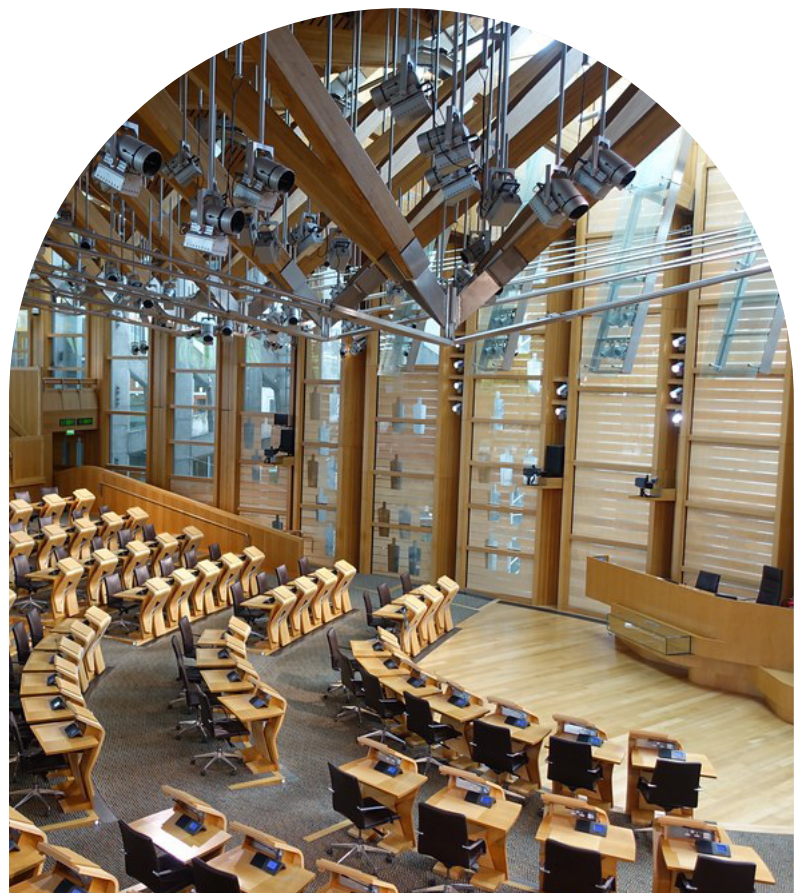
Outcomes

We will set targets for:

- Increasing capacity in nations to engage with research and KE related opportunities
- Number of KE events/activities with cross nations engagement
- Nations supported in achieving their national KE deliverables/plans by staff across the OU.

Mechanisms

- **Use new ways of working to enable consistent academic engagement with KE across all four nations.** The move to greater remote and hybrid working provides an opportunity for staff to deliver more KE activity across all four nations, particularly in regions without a 'local' HEI, opening up regional funding opportunities and maximising local connections.
- **Facilitate greater networking across the nations** to enable exchange of ideas, good practice and opportunities in order to encourage greater collaborative working, to showcase success stories, and to build on the nation's track record to inspire greater academic involvement.
- **Identify areas of overlap or complementarity in local (devolved) priorities for KE.** Through the HEIF (England), RWIF (Wales), UIF (Scotland) and HEIF NI & Connected (FE/HE/SME business Collaboration) (Ireland) the OU has a unique opportunity to leverage greater KE activity across and disseminate that activity at scale.



Activity 5: Improving Our Processes

Purpose

We aim to be as efficient and effective as possible so we can concentrate our efforts on delivering effective KE. An internal review of KE against the eight KEC principles informed the development of the KEC Action Plan, as approved by Research Committee and submitted to Universities UK (UUK). The KE Plan will subsume the work of the KEC Action Plan into one.

KE Plan activity will also complement the work being done through the Research Plan on improving processes.

Outcomes

We will set targets for:

- Positive review by UUK/Research England of progress against the KEC Action Plan
- Improvements on reporting to increase HE-BCI data quality

Mechanisms

- **Reduce barriers to engaging with KE** and focus resources to build the next generation of KE leaders across our faculties and in each of the four nations. In parallel with the **Research Plan**, we need a more diverse staff and research student population to bring a broad range of perspectives and experiences into our KE culture and environment. It is critical that we seek to improve the diversity of our KE community to meet their own ambitions and to ensure that our impact reaches the full breadth of society. To reduce barriers to engagement with KE and increase Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in the sector, we will create an academic mentoring programme designed to match experienced researchers and external mentors with OU academics aspiring to develop their KE activity and KE leadership skills.
- **Ensure OU policies and processes facilitate efficient delivery of the KE Plan.** Our IP and consultancy policies and processes will be updated to efficiently facilitate KE activity; reflect the size and scope of individual opportunities; meet expectations of external partners; and incentivise academics to engage with KE, IP, and consultancy activity. We will review service provision to ensure a professional customer-orientated approach and ensure that there are appropriate systems and processes that are well embedded and part of our culture that manage our KE knowledge and data.
- **Embed evaluation of KE into working practices at local and institutional level.** KE Board will monitor targets set within the KE Plan and seek to identify causes for not meeting targets, identifying solutions, and mitigating actions. We will assist with building evaluation into KE projects so that learning can be shared and influence future activity.
- **Promote the OU's distinctive KE activity to enhance our external reputation, collaboration, and funding opportunities.** We will showcase success stories from across the UK and actively seek out like-minded investors, funders, and collaborators to deliver societal impact and support a broad spectrum of entrepreneurs.
- **Maximise external business connections** by fostering closer working relationships between the Research, Enterprise, and Scholarship Unit (RES), Business Development Unit (BDU), nations, and faculties and opening new avenues of opportunity.

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