

High-level implementation plan



KNOWLEDGE
EXCHANGE
CONCORDAT

Introduction

The knowledge exchange concordat has been created to facilitate the development, enhancement and transparency of the wide range of knowledge exchange (KE) activities performed by higher education providers, and to support the partnerships integral to their success.

It is being implemented by the sector, for the sector, recognising that autonomous higher education providers play a critical role in KE policy and practice and hence need to lead on sharing and implementing good practice. The KE concordat is being developed with recognition of the needs of relevant external partners, government and funders, and implementation is supported by the UK's higher education funding bodies (HEFBs).

It is proposed that the concordat is implemented at two levels:

1 **high-level strategic co-ordination across the UK** including the adoption of the principles, commitment to furthering the KE performance enhancement agenda through raising awareness and dissemination of best practice, and evaluation.

2 **detailed implementation of the processes** of higher education providers' commitment to the KE concordat and support for individual institutional development in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.



The coordinating organisation is Universities UK (UUK), working with GuildHE.

A dedicated post at UUK, and input from the National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB), are funded by Research England, with further supporting activities provided in kind by UUK.



Implementing the knowledge exchange concordat involves an initial development year, with a review to consider embedding it long-term.

UUK published the ***Concordat for the advancement of knowledge exchange in higher education*** in early spring 2020, following the first meeting of the KE concordat Strategic Group. Details on implementation will be published in October 2020.



The KE concordat has an online presence through a portal hosted by NCUB.

The portal, which is a standalone website, allows access to specific details of the KE concordat and its implementation, alongside signposting to resources and a list of case studies relating to best practice in KE. It is planned that higher education providers in England will use the portal to submit completed action plans in anticipation of the evaluation stage, with the potential for this approach to be rolled out across the rest of the UK.

Call to action

Higher education providers will be invited to 'sign up' by agreeing with the aims and principles of the concordat:

- In England, higher education providers will be invited to participate in the development year and to commit to self-evaluation and the production of a three-to five-year action plan.
- In Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) expect to encourage higher education providers to commit to the principles of the KE concordat. The SFC will use the development year to decide what formal arrangements it may wish to put in place for subsequent years.
- In Wales, higher education providers will be asked to confirm commitment to the principles of the KE concordat through their Research Wales Innovation Funding (RWIF) strategies. Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) will implement a development year in 2020–21 so that during this period a Welsh model for engagement with the concordat can be finalised. The RWIF strategy process allows for higher education providers to update strategies annually as part of the monitoring procedures. This process will be used for any subsequent amendments required to align strategies to the KE concordat. RWIF strategies will be published and considered for additional inclusion on the KE concordat portal.
- In Northern Ireland, higher education providers will be required to commit to the principles of the KE concordat through their KE strategies, the next of which is due for submission to the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland) in September 2020. The detailed outworking of the KE concordat in Northern Ireland will be considered by the Department, in consultation with higher education providers, as part of a wider process of reviewing KE funding in 2020.
- A list of institutions that endorse the aims and principles of the KE concordat and will participate in the development year will be published on the **portal**.

Linking the KE concordat to funding processes

- Research England has stated that it expects higher education providers in receipt of the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) to participate in the implementation of the KE concordat (this was confirmed in guidance on the HEIF round for 2020–21 to 2024–25 in spring 2020, as part of the request for HEIF accountability statements). Research England aims to provide information on long-term institutional HEIF allocations, and to publish first-year knowledge exchange framework (KEF) results before institutions prepare and submit their action plans. This will help institutions to prepare plans with awareness of resourcing and comparative benchmarking information. Research England will take account of the evaluation of the KE concordat when deciding on any reform of the allocation method for HEIF within the first period of action plans.
- In Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is currently reviewing the University Innovation Fund (UIF). The SFC expects to consult with the sector on proposed changes to the UIF and make recommendations to its board later in 2020. The potential relationship between the UIF and the KE concordat will form part of this conversation. It is anticipated that any changes to the UIF will be introduced no earlier than the AY2021/22 funding cycle. The SFC will also need to consider the relevance and appropriateness of linking the KE concordat with university outcome agreements.
- Institutions in Wales in receipt of RWIF are required to submit, and have approved, three-year strategies for 2020/21 to 2022/23. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) will require that RWIF strategies confirm commitment to the principles of the KE concordat, and outline processes for self-evaluation and benchmarking.
- In Northern Ireland, institutions in receipt of Northern Ireland HEIF (NI HEIF) allocations are currently required by the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland) to submit, and have approved, KE strategies, which usually cover a three-year period to coincide with the usual NI HEIF funding interval. This funding interval may change as a result of the forthcoming review of KE funding, which is currently due to take place in 2020. As part of this review, the Department will consider how the principles of the KE concordat will be implemented as a condition of NI HEIF funding in the future, in terms of self-evaluation and benchmarking.

Definition of higher education providers and their relationship with the KE concordat

In England a higher education provider is an organisation that delivers higher education, as defined in Schedule 6 of the Education Reform Act 1988.

A provider can be a body with degree-awarding powers or deliver higher education on behalf of another awarding body. Higher education providers in England need to be registered with the Office for Studies (OfS) to be able to access the student support system. They also need to be registered with the OfS to be eligible for direct grant funding provided by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) through Research England under section 97 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 and in order to apply for research council funding.

Welsh ministers may designate a provider as an institution eligible to receive funding from HEFCW. In Wales, the Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015 provides the opportunity for higher education institutions that are registered charities to be regulated by HEFCW through successfully applying for a fee and access plan and subsequently receive designated status in respect of student support. Institutions that are regulated by HEFCW do not automatically become designated to receive HEFCW funding.

In Northern Ireland, the Department for Economy may, under the terms of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, make grants to the governing body of any higher education institution in Northern Ireland in respect of expenditure incurred or to be incurred by it for the purposes of the provision of education and the undertaking of research by that institution. Under the terms of the order, a 'higher education institution' means a university or college of education or any other institution that provides higher education courses and is designated by regulations as a higher education institution.

In Scotland, fundable bodies are those specified in Schedule 2 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005 (as amended).

It follows that the development and roll-out of the KE concordat should reflect the diverse nature of the higher education sector. All registered higher education providers – be they universities, university colleges or other institutions – that engage in KE activities, whether research- or teaching-led, will be encouraged to consider how the KE concordat applies to them or their individual situations.

Small grant scheme



A competitive small grants scheme will be created to reward higher education providers for commitment to continuous improvement (for example, rewarding good practice in action plans) and to support them in further developing and sharing good practice (for example, in providing resources for the portal). The grants scheme will only be available in England. Details will be confirmed later in 2020.

Timescales

March 2020

- First meeting of the Strategic Group; high level implementation plan agreed/signed off
- Detailed implementation plan for England signed off

April 2020

- Formal launch of the KE concordat portal
- Publication of the KE concordat on the portal

June to July 2020

- Introductory webinar on the KE concordat held
- KE concordat evaluation process in England consultative webinar held
- Feedback fed into development year evaluation report

September 2020

- Publication of the high-level implementation plan and detailed English plan

October 2020 to July 2021

- Implementation of the development year
- Institutional self-evaluations carried out in England and action plans submitted for evaluation by the appointed Evaluation Group (but not published in the development year)
- Evaluation Group feedback provided to each higher education provider, with recommendations for the award of competitive grants, and a sector-wide summary and evaluation
- Institutional self-evaluations carried out in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales in accordance with the requirements of their respective funding bodies

October 2021

- Strategic Group meet to consider the report of the English Evaluation Group, reflect on the Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish exercises and to make recommendations on next steps and embedding
- Strategic Group provides recommendations on the next steps for the sector, for the UK's HEFEBs generally, and specifically to Research England on embedding KE in HEIF allocations as part of its reform programme

Timescales

Next steps

- Subject to outcomes of evaluation and decisions on funding and accountability processes:
 - higher education providers and any partners will be asked to commit long term to the KE concordat with signatories, with this commitment published on the portal
 - in England, higher education institutions will be asked to update action plans and provide these for publication on the portal (timescale to be decided)
 - in Wales, institutions will be asked to commit to the KE concordat through their 2020/21 to 2022/23 RWIF strategies, which will be submitted to HEFCW in May 2020
 - in Northern Ireland, institutions will be asked to commit to the KE concordat through their future KE strategies (the next of which is due for submission September 2020)
 - in Scotland, SFC will encourage universities to commit to the principles of the concordat and will use the development year to understand what formal arrangements it may wish to put in place subsequently.

Governance structure

a. Strategic Group (UK-wide)

The KE concordat implementation will be managed by UUK, working with GuildHE, the four UK HEFBs and other representatives to form a Strategic Group that will guide the work of the Operational Group and consider long-term approaches, alignments and the embedding of the KE concordat across the UK.



Main responsibilities

The main responsibilities of the group include:

- approving proposed high-level implementation plan (this document)
- evaluating the concordat development
- making recommendations for long-term development
- advising on the draft of the KE concordat and design of the portal
- advising on the detailed plans for England (including evaluation process), and guidance on templates for self-evaluation and action planning
- advising on plans for a small grants process
- proposing members for the evaluation panel (for England only).

Membership

The strategic group is formed of:

- UUK
- GuildHE
- Research England
- Scottish Funding Council
- Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
- Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland)
- NCUB
- six representatives from higher education providers from across the UK (proposed by UUK and GuildHE, and endorsed by the UK HEFBs, to cover a representative range of higher education providers)

The Strategic Group will be chaired by **Professor Trevor McMillan** (University of Keele). The chair of the Evaluation Group (conducted for activities in England only) will be invited to the first strategic meeting as an observer to contribute to finalising plans for the evaluation process.

Governance structure

b. Operational Group (England only)

An Operational Group will oversee the practical implementation of the concordat in England, meeting regularly, seeking the advice and input of key individuals and groups and reporting to the Strategic Group as appropriate.



Main responsibilities

The main responsibilities of the group include:

- developing the governance structure and terms of reference for all KE concordat signatories
- providing feedback to NCUB on the KE concordat portal as appropriate
- (ahead of Strategic Group meeting) finalising the KE concordat, high-level implementation plan and detailed implementation plans for England
- confirming the membership of the evaluation panel, using suggestions from the Strategic Group
- signing off (in light of comments from the Strategic Group) detailed implementation plans for England, the evaluation process in England, and guidance and templates.

Membership

The strategic group is formed of:

- UUK
- GuildHE
- Research England
- NCUB.

Greg Wade, Policy Manager, at UUK, will chair the Operational Group.

Governance structure

c. Stakeholder forum (UK-wide)



A stakeholder forum will be established to raise awareness of the concordat at an open launch event, to engage with a range of higher education stakeholders and other interested parties outside the sector, and to receive feedback on long-term engagement plans.

The event will be organised by UUK, working with GuildHE, NCUB and Research England. The stakeholder forum event is planned for spring 2021.

d. Evaluation Group (England only)



An Evaluation Group will be appointed on an individual basis, comprising experts in KE who will evaluate institutional action plans in England.

A transparent selection process for evaluators will be developed with a role description and selection criteria. Invitations will go out to the higher education sector and a range of other organisations to encourage applications from suitably experienced and qualified colleagues. Successful individuals would undertake the role in a personal capacity and a process to avoid conflicts of interest. The appointment process will ensure evaluators represent a wide range of experience, backgrounds and institutional type and will include a strong focus on equality and diversity.

Main responsibilities

The main responsibilities of the group include:

- evaluating action plans and providing feedback to institutions
- providing an English sector-wide overview and evaluation report on the exercise to the Strategic Group to inform next steps (other HEFEBs will provide their own assessments of their approaches)

Annexe A

Proposed implementation plans for England

Development year (2020–21)

Higher education providers will initially be invited to sign up by agreeing with the aims and principles of the KE concordat (the sign-up will be published on the KE concordat portal). They will be invited to further commit to participate in the development year by carrying out a self-evaluation exercise and producing an action plan that will be evaluated, but not published in the development year. Action plans may cover multiple years, reflecting appropriate timescales for ambitious changes, but there will be an opportunity to update these for the first-year exercise.

Higher education providers will prepare a self-evaluation and conduct a gap analysis in relation to the principles of the KE concordat and in the context of their own published strategies relevant to KE (eg, a KE strategy, sections of the institutional corporate strategy or relevant sections of other institutional strategies. This is also the approach for HEIF accountability statements, ie, reference to published strategies). Guidance on how higher education providers may wish to complete self-evaluation will be published on the portal (including taking account of HEIF allocations and accountability statements and KEF results), but no template will be provided.

For the development year, a higher education provider's self-evaluation exercise will feed into the completion of an initial action plan (an action plan template and guidance will be provided on the portal). The exact details of the action plan submission process will be confirmed in October 2020 in published guidance for preparing, completing, and submitting an action plan. There will be a submission period for all from May to July 2021. Every action plan will be examined by an England-wide team of evaluators drawn from the evaluation panel. Feedback will be given, focusing on the action plan's ambition in terms of taking action to improve the provider's KE priorities and strategic vision. For the development year, feedback will be confidential, and the action plans will not be published.

The Evaluation Group may also be asked to make recommendations on small grants, either:

- to reward distinctive commitment to continuous improvement, or
- to identify areas where commissioning additional good practice materials could be of value to the sector as a whole.

To conclude

At the end of the development year, the Evaluation Group will work with the Strategic Group to publish a sector-wide, anonymised review of the action plans, highlighting good practice and recommendations. This will be part of a wider review of implementation in the UK that will inform the process of embedding the KE concordat long term.













Research England will expect higher education providers in receipt of HEIF to commit to the concordat. Research England have set this out in its HEIF guidance in spring 2020.

Plans for full implementation

Subject to evaluation, the intention is that higher education providers – and external partners – will be asked to formally sign up to the concordat and its long-term implementation approach. This approach could include in the first year updating existing action plans in response to the feedback or submitting action plans for the first time. These would also be evaluated and where appropriate endorsed by the evaluation panel and published. The action plan process could then be planned on a periodic cycle, including an assessment of progress made in implementing the previous action plan and determining next improvement goals.

Proposals for full implementation will be subject to the evaluation of the development year, decision on how the KE concordat is embedded in reformed HEIF in England, plans for the devolved nations and further consultation with the sector and stakeholders.

KE concordat – timeline in England (for development year)

<p>January 2020</p> 		<p>Publication of KE concordat consultation response summary</p>
<p>April 2020</p> 		<p>Launch of new online KE concordat portal and publication of KE concordat</p>
<p>October 2020</p> 		<p>Launch of institutional ask and publication of guidance and action plan templates</p>
<p>November 2020 – April 2021</p> 		<p>Higher education providers in England carry out self-evaluation</p>
<p>May – July 2021</p> 		<p>Higher education providers in England submit action plans for evaluation</p>
<p>Autumn 2021</p> 		<p>Overall evaluation of development year to advise future years</p>

