

KEC IMPLEMENTATION SERIES 2022: ENGAGING ACADEMICS

BREAKOUT SESSION SUMMARY

Wednesday 12th October 2022

Overview

This summary presents the recommendations emerging from the breakout group discussions during the KEC Engaging Academics webinar in October 2022. We are very grateful to all breakout session participants for engaging so meaningfully with our prompts and for taking the time to share the outcomes of these discussion exercises with us.

In addition to this summary, we encourage the reader to consult the accompanying **Webinar Presentations Summary** for further ideas emerging from the presentations made by our speakers. We have also collated **a list of resources and further reading**, as recommended by the speakers and participants. The full webinar recording and speaker slides are also available **here**.

We have preserved the original wording from group notes as far as possible, throughout this summary.

For more information on the KEC Implementation Series 2022, please visit:
<https://www.keconcordat.ac.uk/events/kec-implementation-series-2022/>

For any questions about this or other webinar materials, please contact Ariadna Tsenina at **ariadna.tsenina@universitiesuk.ac.uk**

I. THINKING NEGATIVELY

What steps could we take to disengage academics?

*Note: The responses below were recorded as part of a brainstorm exercise encouraging participants to list the types of actions they could take, were they seeking to **intentionally disengage** academics. This information is provided for reference only, as additional food for thought that might spark some positive steps to help academic colleagues, when reversed.*

• **Do not reward or recognise good KE**

- Do not provide any incentives or rewards
- Ensure that there is no clear recognition of KE efforts
- Do not recognise KE in promotion procedures - do not promote academics on the basis of their KE and impact
- Ensure that KE activity will have a negative impact on promotion
- Attribute good KE work to the Head of Department
- Do not offer any financial incentives
- Do not hold any celebration events - do not celebrate success
- Promote those with REF impact cases and not others with non-REF impacts and examples of KE

• **Set standards that are difficult to achieve**

- Focus on commercial income targets only - do not recognise non-revenue KE
- Only count KE activity as 'good' if it leads to a publication
- Tell academics that KE does not matter unless it generates income for the university
- Set unrealistic income expectations - or set a minimum contract value of £100k
- Apply too much pressure and expectation
- Use the same case study as an example of success all the time
- Give more attention to easily-quantifiable metrics of success

• **Discourage or punish attempts at KE**

- Punishment for failed KE attempts
- Name and shame the teams making KE mistakes in discussions with senior leaders
- Make sure that if the initial idea is not feasible, it is shut down immediately
- Share negative examples and disaster stories about previously-attempted projects
- Tell academics that their idea is terrible - or that their research is not very good/interesting
- Tell academics that they should prioritise something else

- **Do not tell academics that KE is valuable**

- Focus too much on metrics and not the benefits to the academic's research
- Do not tell academics about the benefits that KE can generate for them and the institution

- **Make it confusing**

Confusing routes to KE and connections to other work

- Do not provide any clear routes for engaging with KE
- Do not explain how this links to their research or teaching
- Make sure that progression pathways for KE are not clear

Confusing language

- Promote KE using jargon and acronyms like KEF, KE, impact
- Make KE difficult to understand, using a mix of terminologies so that academics don't know how it applies to them
- Make legal/IP sound very complicated

Inconsistency

- Change what you mean by KE in every piece of communication
- Have several teams that support KE across the university that are all called different things
- Do not have any KE policies in place
- Do not have a clear strategy
- Change strategy after launching KE activity
- Lack of shared understanding of KE definitions

Not user-friendly

- Overwhelm them with information
- Make the KE website/internal comms sites difficult to find
- Withhold information
- Make training and development resources really difficult to understand - long-winded and not very user-friendly

- **Cut communication and networks**

- Cut ties to and communication with external partners
- Do not pass on opportunities in a timely manner - send these at the last minute, so that academics do not have enough time to prepare an application

- Hide business pages that invite external stakeholders to engage with us
- Do not invite academics to key events (e.g. networking)
- Ignore opportunities that are available to all universities (e.g. KEC pilot, UPEN, IG, etc.)
- Never talk about KE
- Encourage solo working - discourage interdisciplinary sharing
- Focus website on student recruitment

• **Exclude certain academics**

- Only engage with senior academics
- Ensure that collaborations are passed on to academics regardless of whether they are qualified/specialising in that area
- Only engage with 1-2 academics who are 'easy' to work with

• **Do not help academics**

- Have no senior buy-in for supporting KE activity
- Lack of professional support function or capability - do not offer dedicated KE support
- Assume that they have enough technical ability already
- Mandate KE without support or resources
- Insufficient back-office contract support
- Put academics into a situation or a forum where they do not feel comfortable or prepared - ask them to engage with external parties without background or context as to why they are there
- Do not engage with questions or concerns
- Only help them to engage with businesses
- Provide support with no specialist knowledge or expertise

• **Remove time and resources**

- Stop giving academics funds for KE
- Offer no support (people or funding) for KE
- Workload them for lots of teaching, management, responsibilities - with little time for anything else
- Starve KE of resources
- Expect KE to be done in the person's own time
- Do not consider work load models

- Put time barriers in the way by not responding to emails or taking a long time to handle contracts, costings or general enquiries
 - Create long jams around contracts and finance/payments
 - Organise everything through central services
 - Keep leftover funding to disincentivise academic engagement
- **Make KE clash with other activity**
 - Ask academics to undertake KE at busy periods, such as grant deadlines
 - Put all KE training at peak marking times
 - Ask them to participate in KE activities at weekends or outside of normal business hours at short notice
- **Increase burden**
 - Make academics provide the same information multiple times
 - Require long reports for every piece of KE
 - Ignore other pressures
 - Increase the bureaucracy in our processes

II. THINKING POSITIVELY

What steps could we take to engage academics?

Note: Groups were asked to select their 'Top Three' recommendations for positive actions that could help to engage academics in KE. The most common recommendations have been grouped into headings (duplications have been removed).

- **Recognise and reward KE**

- credit contributions of everyone involved in projects and activities (using film credit approach) - the outcome of this will be greater ownership of KE, not just at HoD/Senior levels but among those with more hidden contributions (e.g. technicians)
- recognise staff for their KE contribution (e.g. KE job family allowing promotion opportunities from KE)
- acknowledge contributions, including impact (REF)
- establish or review institutional KE recognition processes
- incentivise KE - broader than reward and reputation acknowledgement (e.g. celebrating success; reducing teaching hours to give time to set up KE projects)
- recognise, count and value diverse KE/engagement methods
- make successful KE part of the promotion criteria

- **Improve training and clarity around KE**

- invest in skills and competence development
- refresh training materials and delivery - make it more user-friendly, use less jargon
- clear communication on processes, policies and training
- provide clear routes to becoming involved in KE
- simple, transparent processes
- clear point of support - where do academics go for support? e.g. via a Director of Research and KE

- more consistent framework for capturing and reporting on impact
- make information accessible, user-friendly and simple - reassure and provide support and guidance
- intuitive intranet pages
- training in KE and disseminating information about KE - link this to business engagement, so that there are businesses present (and bring catering, including wine)
- easy access for academics to understand where their needs sit on the KE pipeline
- publicise career pathways
- build confidence
- **Improve support**
 - improve timings
 - streamline processes for enquiries and contracts - make it as easy as possible for staff and professional services, too
 - continue to improve processes and online systems - provide information and support on how best to use these
- **More time and resources**
 - sufficient human resources
 - provide funding or support to access funding for KE activity
 - sustainable long-term funding for KE
 - mainstreaming KE into core business - expectation that there is sufficient time allocation to develop and deliver KE activities
 - specific KE 'workloading' or include KE in research workload
 - consider all work pressure and remove some administrative burden

- **Signal the importance of and the wide range of benefits from KE**

- focus on benefits of KE for researchers
- positioning KE as part of the whole rather than just another task to do - KE is one of the tools that will allow academics to gain impact and build connections to students
- emphasise that KE is part of 'making a difference'
- KEF metrics - formal and informal, hard and soft KE. What is measured and what could be measured? How to measure direct income? Measuring for social science and the humanities is hard - could a more HEBCIS-like approach be more appropriate? Local growth and regeneration is self-assessed - could this give leeway for other measurements of KE?
- make it clear in leadership and communication that KE is a priority

- **Supportive and sustainable culture around KE**

- see all ideas as starting points and encourage academics to examine ideas in groups against a specific criteria framework
- teamwork
- commitment from leadership
- build supportive communities of practice
- get academic staff early in their careers - otherwise they might 'stay in their lane'
- sharing ideas between institutions is very valuable
- integrate KE into JD's and activities