

# KEC IMPLEMENTATION SERIES 2022: DEFINING WHAT 'GOOD' LOOKS LIKE

## BREAKOUT SESSION SUMMARY

*Wednesday 9th November 2022*

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### *Overview*

This summary presents the recommendations emerging from the breakout group discussions during the KEC Defining What 'Good' Looks Like webinar in November 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**.

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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](mailto:ariadna.tsenina@universitiesuk.ac.uk)**

## DEFINING WHAT 'GOOD' LOOKS LIKE

*Note: We have combined the comments and recommendations made by all groups into one list - duplications (identical comments from different groups) have been removed. Therefore, this list does not indicate the frequency of participants' comments for each heading and sub-heading.*

### • **When have you needed to define 'good'?**

#### **Training and sharing best practice**

- Engaging with researchers to develop knowledge and skills
- Training sessions for academic success
- Training for support staff at the university - help them to better support academics in KE
- Talks on KE - what it involves and how to embed it into our culture
- Training on the value of KTPs to all partners, including academics
- Training on 'what is KE?'
- Understanding roles and responsibilities
- Facilitating continuous improvement
- Talks at conferences

#### **Supporting 'good'**

- Supporting staff and academics in following the latest and best practice
- Helping people to do more meaningful KE, rather than smaller and more localised activities

#### **Gathering and communicating evidence of impact - for funding bodies and other stakeholders**

- Stakeholders - reporting to external funders
- REF - including creating compelling narratives on reach and significance of impact
- KEF
- HE-BCI - including understanding which activities can feed into HE-BCI
- KE Concordat action planning
- HEIF and KEIF high-level plans
- Providing evidence of successful KE / needing proof
- Need to measure success, so have to define it first
- Given the drive for metrics, staff need to understand the context
- For communicating impact to panel members, senior managers in university, and public

- Showing pathways to impact for funding bids
- Communications with staff - explaining what KE/impact generation is, asking for 'good' examples which can be used as

## Promoting KE and increasing engagement

- Promoting KE amongst academics and senior leadership team - defining what KE is and what 'good' means to get 'buy-in' from internal stakeholders is difficult
- Stakeholder engagement in general - explaining why they should engage with us
- Making the case for KE and getting resources to support KE
- Internal communication - raising awareness, so that everyone understands what KE is

## Recognition

- Academic career pathway - illuminating the pathway
- KE awards scheme - need boundaries and criteria for assessment

## Working with KE partners

- Co-creation with partners to create impact, generate and apply knowledge
- Wouldn't use KE as language to business (only to funders) - need an accessible definition

## Strategy

- Reviewing and rewriting KE strategy at the moment
- Institutional KE strategy and action-planning

## Other

- Had to define 'good' in every instance that has not generated income or a REF case study

## • Why is it important to define 'good'?

- Encourages **good practice and motivation**
- Creates **a shared language** - being able to talk about their activity in the language of KE can unlock opportunities, support and peer esteem.
- Demonstrates the **full depth and strength** of partnerships, and creates **sustainable partnerships** that last beyond the project - **creates better impact**

- **More efficient use of time and resources** through adopting best practice
- At present, KE suffers from resource limitation, which makes it dependent on a 'bottom-up' approach - defining 'good' is important for **encouraging people and resourcing them to be more ambitious** in the scale of the activities

### • Approaches towards defining 'good'

#### Tailor 'good' to context

- Showcase what 'good' looks like within the context of your institution and different departments
- There is a wide range of types of KE that can be 'good' - this depends on the target audience and objective/purpose for your definition
- Can refer to elements of KEF but within institutional context/ambition
- Look for synergies between different audiences and contexts

#### Maintain flexibility and focus on value

- Try not to be too descriptive or focused on a certain type of KE, as this can put people off
- Focus on the impact KE makes, rather than the process
- Focus on delivering value without being too prescriptive
- Definition of 'value' should not discourage potential participants - e.g. focusing on monetary value only
- Good practice vs practising well - helpful to think of the approach to *doing KE well* being different from a specific *activity* which counts as 'good' KE
- Answer the question of 'what's in it for us?' (depending on your audience)

#### Think about language

- Use a list of examples if you cannot define 'good' concisely
- Tailor language to different audiences
- Use the language of solutions - good KE provides solutions, and seeing it as a solution helps to make it relevant to all kinds of stakeholders

#### Work with partners

- Defining 'good' is a two-way street - a dialogue with external partners / listen to partners

## • Towards a definition of ‘good’

### Processes behind ‘good’

- Good/clear communication
- Good project management
- Good customer service
- Establishing a clear shared vision and objectives with partners
- Setting realistic expectations
- Supported by appropriate training and resources
- Feedback mechanisms for external partners, evaluating impact with external partners to keep them coming back
- Timely
- Streamlined administrative process - including smoother facilitation of contractual and operational processes (e.g. IP, payment processes that are appropriate for partners to achieve equitable benefit, etc.)
- Allowing time for impacts to emerge

### Principles

- Trust
- Honesty
- Equitable partnerships
- Diversity of people and activity
- Listening and understanding between partners - learning from each other
- Co-production and co-benefit
- Recognition of diverse pathways to impact
- Valuing and respecting different contributions

### Key outcome of ‘good’ KE - mutual value

*Note: this theme emerged in most group discussions*

- Mutually beneficial - all partners should be getting benefit and feeling the impact
- Shared benefits
- Demonstrate value to all parties involved - funders/government/ROs/HEIs/businesses/partners/staff, students and researchers themselves

## Key outcome of 'good' KE - relationships

*Note: this theme emerged in most group discussions*

- Relationships built on the principles outlined above
- At an institutional level, this might mean measuring the quality, types, diversity and equity of partnerships
- Long-term relationships - e.g. external partner is a return customer or the extension of relationships/projects into longer-term partnerships

## Examples of value (will vary across contexts)

### *Economic*

- Income generation
- Infrastructure
- Motivation to 'spin out' companies and IP
- Local regeneration
- Value for external partner as a competitive advantage over competition

### *Academic / Research*

- Enabling researchers to see that their research makes a difference
- Co-production of research
- CPD
- Teaching, research
- Knock-on effects for students and other staff

### *Other comments*

- Social, cultural, financial outcomes - see EntreComp 2018 definition of value within enterprise
- Measuring 'time' as an indication of success
- Value will depend on the institution
- Good KE has lots of benefits - expectations of what these benefits will be should be broad, and we should be encouraging a focus on as many benefits (including side-benefits) as possible.
- KE is a two-way activity - an academic might be a catalyst between communities that may not touch outside of that connection, so bringing together different groups and perspectives can also be a type of value/benefit

## • Challenges around defining ‘good’

- Even **defining what ‘KE’ is** - is a task
- What is the **benchmark? Who decides** what ‘good’ is?
- Definition of ‘good’ KE is **not one-size-fits-all** - needs a tailored approach for each type of KE/group of academics
- You have to tailor definitions depending on who you’re talking to - this creates the issue that you’re capturing a lot of information and adapting to different audiences, so it is very **resource-intensive**
- Embedding it **across the organisation**
- Takes **a long time**, especially in larger universities
- **Recognition** problems around KE - e.g. getting KE accepted on a par with teaching and research
- Because this is all so dependent on multi-faceted factors, it is hard to articulate what ‘good’ is and make a common case to **a broad range of audiences**. The latter includes funders and others who also want to understand whether or to what extent KE is worthwhile, and how much funding / what resources should be dedicated to it.

## • Explaining what ‘good’ looks like to others

### *Challenges*

- How do we increase meaningful awareness with the **outside world**? Positive promotion of KE, university roles in the outside community?
- KE feels quite **‘fuzzy’** for the public to get their heads around
- Need to **show impact** to get coverage about KE
- Feel like KEF narrative statements are produced and then **never really seen** by the wider population. We should be asking *how* universities are *communicating* their KE as well as what KE they are doing.
- **Where** to disseminate - website? Local/national press? Need to know the best ways to reach people.

### *Tips and Ideas*

- **Funder perspective** - we value metrics and narratives (which can also include video and other formats)
- **Case studies** are invaluable - especially short **videos**
- **Show 'happy' partners** - long-standing relationships, satisfied with services
- **Find partners with shared values** - target these partners with your case studies and stories of 'good'
- The challenge is that you can focus too quickly on method without realising the **potential of the stakeholders who can disseminate the message** more widely
- Explore more **creative approaches** for visualising 'good' and understanding goals from KE. For example, given the breadth that KE can cover - having a **multi-dimensional Venn** diagram, where the spot in the middle is finding an activity which will hit as many audiences as possible, maybe different delivery methods but a common theme. Use this Venn diagram approach for senior management/academics - what other dimensions can you add to the Venn diagram? Different stories need different formats - what is your story (in the middle of the Venn diagram)? Then look to build from there.
- Focus on what KE can contribute to and enhance for staff in terms of **research and teaching** - emphasise working on real-world problems and the chance to have a direct impact on issues outside of the university (e.g. social inclusion)
- Focus on showcasing **outcomes for staff** - e.g. papers published, link to research impact, REF impact, personal and professional development, promotion criteria
- **Urban and rural regions** - engaging with businesses and organisations in different in different contexts. Perceptions of impact can differ - also, avoid using the word 'business' in rural areas
- Important to be **mindful of the language** used with different staff/stakeholders/partners - including when defining KE to different actors for different purposes

### • **Further comments from participants**

- There is a role for funders to give more explicit expectations, or guidance on and scrutiny of evaluation, on what counts as 'good' in KE, so that there isn't a disproportionate burden on academics to always connect their projects to big national drivers (social change). This might enable academics to focus more on the process of KE itself (not just the outcome)

- and invest in continuous improvement relating specifically to KE (provided that this is also enabled through workload allocation and institutional recognition for KE).
- We need high-level and broad criteria for 'good', where universities can still be diverse and distinct. E.g. scale of activity; money leveraged; international/local/regional; spin-outs and commercialisation; large corporates vs SMEs; job creation... All universities should be able to show their own strengths within these metrics - but don't want to have more work for HEIs to have to start tracking new things.
- We need more forums to share what 'good' KE looks like and what it involves
- The focus on good practice emphasising the reciprocity (or mutual value) of KE isn't mirrored by the types of activity that are being measured/rewarded - e.g. CPD, spin-outs, etc. How reciprocal is this?