



# KEC IMPLEMENTATION SERIES 2022: ALIGNING KEC WITH INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGY

## BREAKOUT SESSION SUMMARY

*Wednesday 7th December 2022*

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### *Overview*

This summary presents the recommendations emerging from the breakout group discussions during the Aligning KEC With Institutional Strategy webinar in December 2022.

We are very grateful to all breakout session participants for engaging so thoughtfully and honestly with our prompts, and for taking the time to share the outcomes of these discussion exercises with us.

The webinar recording and speaker slides are 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/>**

**• Has the KE Concordat been helpful for raising the profile of KE and connecting this to your institution's strategic objectives?**

**YES**

*Conversations, Dialogue*

- Has prompted a conversation about what KE is - useful to unpack that internally e.g. definitions of 'collaborative research'
- Change in tone
- Highlighted the importance of language and dialogue
- KEC has forced a conversation to happen internally (which may or may not have happened, but KEC has made things happen more quickly) - it has accelerated the pace of internal conversations

*Understanding of KE and its connection to research*

- It moved thoughts of impact further forward in the research process, not an afterthought
- Impact by design
- Shift in perception
- It has helped with defining key areas such as concepts - bringing together KE and impact
- Increased confidence in reaching out

*Driving and structuring activity across the institution*

- KEC mobilised the right people, and busy people, to get together which, in turn, accelerated some of the KE projects themselves
- KEC was helpful as aligned well with KE strategy and its action plan - it is not well known 'on the ground' but as a driver for wider KE activity it was helpful at an institutional level
- KEC is helpful for strategic planning
- KEC came at the right time and provided a framework to suggest how we work - this transformed our approach and we have seen significant growth
- Clear promotion routes for KE were established - KEC helped to elevate KE within institution and give clear structures for governance and oversight

*Other*

- Implicitly, not explicitly

- We've raised the profile of KE through the Concordat, KEF not so easily recognised, particularly outside HE sector
- Raised the status of KE
- It has also supported reporting to other KE initiatives

### **NO**

- KEC has not been as helpful as KEF in raising the profile of KE. Interested to see how this will align with HEIF accountability statement.
- Other concordats dilute KEC. Clash of submissions - can get very confusing and need to be careful, so that we don't turn people off.
- Useful as a driver of wider KE activity at an institutional level but for people "on the ground" KEC is not well known.
- Set up a working group for Concordat, but once submitted lost momentum. 5 year strategy - not enough KE incorporated.

### **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

- Timing matters - there could be an opportunity to embed the KEC Action Plan at a meaningful point in the institutional strategy cycle, and feed into different steering groups and their agendas.
- Funder perspective: level of engagement in KEC is varied per institution. KE profile not yet raised by KEC - REF impact has raised profile. Strategic planning - volatile environments have affected planning cycles but KEC is helpful for strategic planning.
- KEC has helped have conversations about KE but the issue is still seen as research OR impact/enterprise in some institutions.
- KEC has been helpful for recognising value of KE but at a burdensome cost (for smaller organisations).

### **• What are some of the biggest challenges to aligning KEC with institutional strategy?**

#### **▸ Timing**

- Timing of strategy-setting and Concordat work might not match
- Action plans can be disrupted or need reprioritisation - e.g. due to change of leadership or capacity issues

- Setting timescales and direction of travel - short-term and long-term
- **Variation in institutional structures and contexts**
  - Internal structures often mean that there are silos of activity - whilst Research and KE are fundamental building blocks of impact, linking up processes and resources can be difficult and can disrupt the links between activities
  - All strategies are different - some better align to KEC than others
  - Strategies need to be broad
  - Approaches and champions are different in different HE institutions
  - Leadership is important to develop the ecosystem
- **KE culture and tensions with research/teaching**
  - Convincing researchers that KE and impact are important for them, notwithstanding their specialisms
  - Poor awareness of KEC
  - Is calling something "knowledge exchange" helping or complicating the discussion? What about performance, or teaching? When does it become "engagement"? Is KE more opaque?
  - How to raise the profile of KE within a teaching-intensive university?
  - There are challenges in aligning Research to delivery on KE/Impact - needs culture change
  - A lot of focus on impact owing to REF - KE is the vehicle for this yet focus (and resource?) goes on impact. Public engagement can also be seen as lower priority as a result.
- **The Concordat**
  - Principles are overlapping and not evenly layered - e.g. evaluating success and continuing improvement could be merged
  - Lack of reporting guidelines for the KEC; lack of timing indication and consideration around timescales and how it all fits together in terms of requirements for similar information - admin burdens
  - Smart objectives - we need to ensure inspirational aspirations are met (medium and long term) but action plans from KEC are a bit mundane
- **Resources and support**
  - Asking people to do more when already stretched and there are few quick wins with KE
  - Lack of resource in smaller institutions relative to larger ones to deliver the activities
  - Recognition and reward for KE activity can still be tricky, and reward mechanisms for individuals are patchy - more good practice examples needed

▸ **Other demands around KE**

- In a year there is a lot going on around KE - is this really sector led or is it more of a schedule of assessment? KEC needs to be a meaningful exercise, rather than being just another one of those activities.
- External assessments tend to compartmentalise Research, KE, etc. They change and can be politically driven. It is easy for HE providers to be pushed and pulled in different directions. We noted the need to have a strong institutional identity - rather than being shaped by external assessments.

• **Ideally, how would you like to use the KE Concordat when it comes to institutional strategy?**

*(Comments from all groups)*

- Using it to add value and raise the profile of a diverse range of research directions
- Use KEC to increase confidence in research active staff
- Use KEC to inform strategy - too much to date is developed on a weak evidence base, so it would be helpful if KEC offered metrics to inform strategy
- Using KEC vs KEF. Strategic decision making needs more KE input. Optimistic that this will change.
- At our level, we're not sure we have a say in institutional strategy
- Not sure the Concordat in itself is a goal. KEC is about a shift in culture and challenging to get it right across the institution. The KEC is helpful in laying out the principles, and providing context for developing strategy - but as a formal process, not sure it's that helpful when it cuts across other reporting requirements.
- Use KEC to feed strategies upwards towards the development of main university institutional strategy. Bottom-led, rather than top-down. Top-down can leave big areas missing - e.g. KE.
- Use KEC to generate common language - lack of common language or definitions on aspects like KE, impact and innovation poses a challenge within institutions.

• **Recommendations**

**FOR COLLEAGUES**

- Use KEC for leverage more often - e.g. asking for support in different ways with reference to the KEC principles/enablers, action plan or other activity
- Ensure that there are plenty of training and discussion opportunities around KE and KEC for both support staff and academic staff - to help raise awareness and understanding around KE, build a better culture around KE, and resolve tensions between research and KE

**FOR THE KE CONCORDAT**

- KEC level of detail needs to be considered in the next round of action plans - too much detail can hinder
- Review KEC word limits for the next round - a little bit more room would be useful (especially earlier on in the action plan), without expectations for essays. As you go down the sections of the KEC submission, it can get quite repetitive. We found that we had lots to say in the beginning where word limits are hard to meet, but less content as it goes on - yet the word limits are the opposite (less at the beginning, and more as it goes on).
- Reading other action plans or extracts from KEC action plans was really helpful to get an idea of what you do in your own institutional context and how your own action plan compares