



Cabinet Office

Five ways the UK is **deepening collaboration with academics**





The UK has **some of the best universities in the world**, but our policy-makers **do not collaborate with academics** as much as we would like.

Many of the reasons are common in other countries:

- **Communication barriers:** academics and officials operate in different worlds, with different languages and timescales.
- **Misaligned incentives:** officials aren't always rewarded for engaging with academics, and it's not much better for academics.
- **Weak networks:** exacerbated by cultural differences and high churn among officials.
- **Government analysts marginalised:** they don't always work well with policy makers.
- **Complex, rapidly evolving policy debates:** make it challenging to match opportunity to need.

1. UK Research & Innovation (UKRI)

UK research and innovation funding bodies have been combined.

- Annual budget of over £7.5bn
- Awarded 4,700 grants in 2018/19
- Established in 2018 to bring together seven research councils, Innovate UK, and Research England



Guidance on submissions

This document sets out the general framework for assessment in the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF) and guidance to UK higher education institutions about making submissions to REF 2021. It includes guidance on procedures, the data that will be required, and the criteria and definitions that will apply. The deadline for submissions is midday, Friday 27 November 2020.

2. Research Excellence Framework

UK academics are now incentivised to demonstrate the impact of their work.

- Impact counts for 25% of REF scores
- In 2014, one high scoring REF impact case study would have earned a university an average of £324,000 over six years

3. What Works Centres

High quality research on policy and support for evaluation

- Seven centres focusing on a variety of areas, including health and social care, education, crime reduction and other areas.
- A combined annual budget of just over £100m.¹



The What Works Network Five Years On



[Home](#)

Collection

Areas of research interest

Areas of research interest (ARI) give details about the main research questions facing government departments.

Published 28 June 2017

Last updated 6 June 2019 — [see all updates](#)

From: [Government Office for Science](#) and [Cabinet Office](#)

ARI also include information on:

- departmental research systems
- research and data publication policies
- research and development strategies

4. Areas of Research Interest

Departments now publish annual summaries of their research interests.

- 15 central government departments submit Areas of Research Interest each year.
- Started as a response to the 2015 Nurse review of the UK Research Councils.

5. Open Innovation Team

A team set up to help policy makers generate analysis and ideas by deepening collaboration between academics and officials.

- Funded by four partner universities.
- More than 200 academics engaged in policy projects so far.





Our work normally falls into one of three main categories: engagement, analysis and ideas.

Engagement

We organise tailored policy conferences, university visits, seminars and networking events to help policy-makers connect and collaborate with leading academics.

Analysis

We help policy-makers research challenges and experiment with new ideas by working with academics and other non-government experts.

Ideas

We work with academics and other non-government experts to help colleagues develop evidence-led policy ideas.

Our **menu of options** summarises the tools we normally use in our work and the approximate timings associated with each.

Engagement outputs

OUTPUT	DESCRIPTION	TIMING
Workshop	Interactive session between academics and officials on a specific theme	1-2 months
University visit	Visit by OIT and officials to a relevant university/institute	1-2 months
Seminar series	A programme of 6-12 seminars with leading experts + accompanying written outputs	6 months
Conference	Half day event with multiple academics and officials + accompanying written outputs.	3-6 months
Expert panel	Set-up and, if requested, manage a panel of experts to inform analysis and policy thinking	2 months +

Analytical outputs

OUTPUT	DESCRIPTION	TIMING
Rapid review	OIT slide pack summarising views of leading thinkers	2-3 weeks
Think piece	Short note written by an expert with OIT support	1 month
Essay collection	A series of expert notes, gathered into a single document	2-3 months
Deep dive	A detailed slide pack or note produced in collaboration with outside experts	2-3 months
Applied research	A research collaboration between officials and academics to address an agreed policy question (e.g. an evaluation or proof of concept for a technology solution)	3 months+

The following **case studies** summarise our work on mental health, digital transformation and growth and labour markets.

Case study: mental health

- Organised a conference for 50+ at the University of Warwick's offices in The Shard bringing together academics and officials to discuss children and young people's mental health.
- Embedded a member of our team in Department of Health Social Care (DHSC) for six months to help develop the children and young people's mental health green paper.
- Proposed that government commit to establishing a new partnership to improve the mental health of 16-25 year olds.
- Arranged meetings and workshops to scope out the idea of setting up a mental health partnership for 16-25s.
- Created a new series of mental health research seminars for DHSC.
- Arranged for a stream of PhD students to join DHSC on placement.

"The Open Innovation Team has provided invaluable support to the work of our team, including very useful work on identification of key issues, bringing academic expertise into the policy development process and developing new policy proposals on 16-25 year old's mental health."

Catherine Tyack
Mental Health Policy
Team, Department of
Health and Social Care

Case study: digital transformation

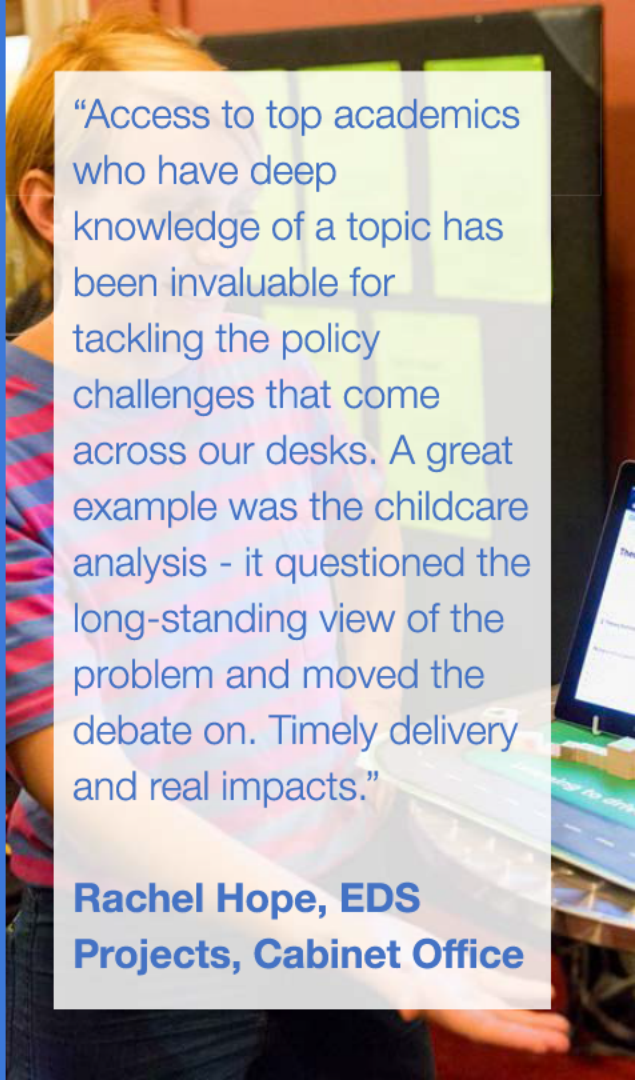
- Led early work on the creation of a GovTech Catalyst with HM Treasury, GDS and DCMS.
- Collaborated with Imperial & Southampton to develop proof of concepts for the use of Distributed Ledger Technology (DLT).
- Delivered a programme of engagement and advice on humane tech, feeding into the 2019 Online harms White Paper.
- Collaborating with more than a dozen universities to deliver analysis and advice on data ethics for DCMS.
- Collaborating with UK Export Finance to test applications for machine learning to improve productivity.
- Set-up a stream of PhD students to work on digital transformation in government.

“The Open Innovation Team has played a vital role in sustaining the government’s community of interest for Distributed Ledger Technology. Their feasibility research has been a step ahead of the rest of government, accelerating thinking on how to get to grips with a new technology.”

Tom Wilkinson
Department for
International Development

Case study: growth and labour markets

- Worked with the University of Bath to provide analysis and advice on childcare reform for Cabinet Office.
- Set-up an expert panel on Shared Parental Leave for BEIS and brokered follow-up research by leading academics.
- Reviewed evidence on low paid, low skilled women for the Government Equalities Office.
- Organised a seminar series for BEIS inviting leading academics to offer perspectives on the industrial strategy.
- Set up a programme of policy conferences inviting academics from leading economics depts to Whitehall to share their ideas on productivity with officials.
- Organised a half day conference on automation and the future of work for HM Treasury, Cabinet Office and others.



“Access to top academics who have deep knowledge of a topic has been invaluable for tackling the policy challenges that come across our desks. A great example was the childcare analysis - it questioned the long-standing view of the problem and moved the debate on. Timely delivery and real impacts.”

**Rachel Hope, EDS
Projects, Cabinet Office**

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