

**Consultation on the design and implementation  
of the Knowledge Exchange Framework**

**Response from the Chartered Association of  
Business Schools**

14 March 2019

The original consultation documents are available at:

<https://re.ukri.org/knowledge-exchange/knowledge-exchange-framework/>

### ***About the Chartered Association of Business Schools***

The Chartered Association of Business Schools is the membership body of the UK's business schools and represents around 120 business schools and higher education providers, as well as affiliate stakeholders, corporate members and international partners. Many UK business schools have a strong focus on producing high quality research and it is therefore in the interests of our members that the KEF is effective in facilitating knowledge exchange between universities and other public stakeholders.

## Introduction

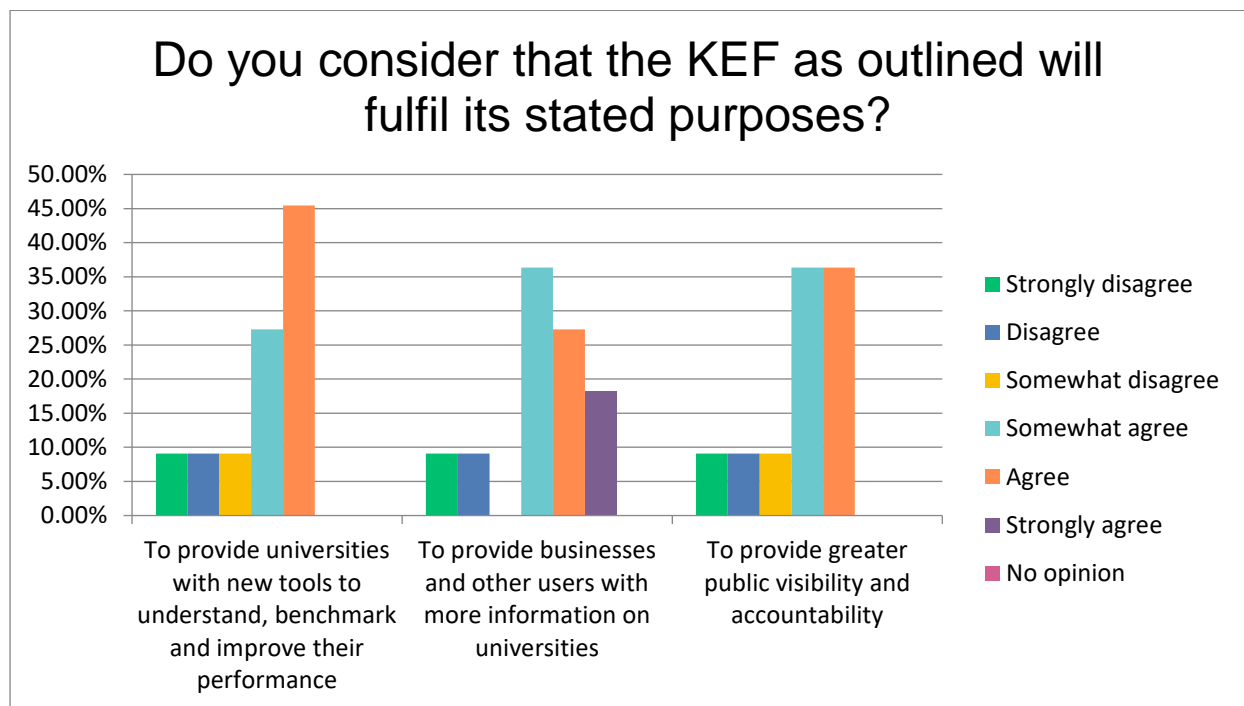
This document outlines our answers to Research England’s technical consultation on the proposed design and implementation plan for the first iteration of the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) for English HEIs. Our response to each question is based on the consensus view of our members as expressed in an online survey which replicated the questions asked by the technical consultation. We have also cited the results we received from members to each closed-ended question.

*Note: Q1 to Q3 of the consultation refer to respondent and organisation details.*

## KEF purpose

*Q4. Do you consider that the KEF as outlined will fulfil its stated purposes?*

- *Q4a: To provide universities with new tools to understand, benchmark and improve their performance.*
- *Q4b: To provide business and other users with more information on universities.*
- *Q4c: To provide greater public visibility and accountability.*



### **Proposed responses:**

**Q4a:** Agree

**Q4b:** Somewhat agree

**Q4c:** Agree

**Proposed explanation:** In theory the KEF framework can offer additional tools to universities to assess and measure elements of their knowledge exchange activity. It will be useful in providing additional focus and direction for the university in terms of activities undertaken and skills and resources needed to enable staff to achieve more with respect to knowledge exchange. If designed and implemented effectively, the KEF will raise public visibility of knowledge exchange activities which to date have neither been well-known or sufficiently valued.

The metrics proposed for KEF are largely existing and therefore do not provide new insights in isolation, although bringing the metrics together in a holistic and recognised framework will be helpful to universities in enabling them to take a broader view of their activities. The metrics data will offer some benchmarking within the proposed clusters but it seems there will be no opportunity to compare performance with institutions in alternative clusters. The metrics will largely use HESA data but this will not capture informal knowledge exchange activities such as interactions with policymakers.

KEF has the potential to provide businesses, public sector and third sector organisations with opportunities for collaborative engagement for commercial and public good. We are concerned, however, that the framework will be of limited use to businesses and other external users as most would want to compare universities in terms of geography or sector expertise in order to make decisions about engagement in knowledge exchange. Unless the universities which are under consideration are in the same cluster, then it appears this would not be possible. In addition it is not clear that the perspectives will be labelled or described in terms which businesses will easily understand or at a level of detail which will make them useful in decision-making.

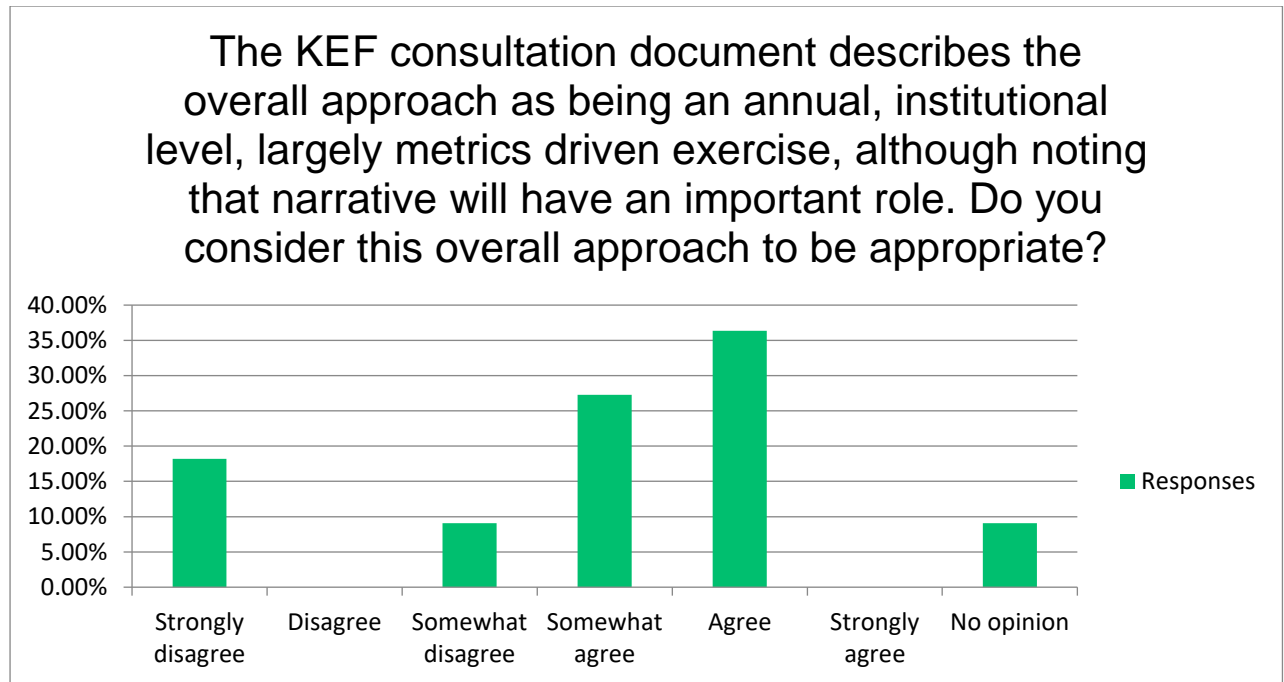
The real test of the value of KEF will be when the resulting data has been determined and shared with institutions but it is not clear that accountability will necessarily follow from the findings. To be effective the findings from KEF would need to influence internal processes related to performance evaluation so that knowledge exchange becomes more effective. It is therefore important that when metrics data is publicly released it is accompanied by explanatory material to give context to the data.

There is also concern amongst some of our member business schools that KEF might lead to further 'gaming' in the area of metrics and league tables. The KEF's focus on particular types of income from the commercial sector may inadvertently penalise certain institutions who receive a relatively higher share of research funding from other sources. More could also be done to ensure that the KEF accounts for the two-way (including co-created) nature of knowledge exchange (e.g. placements, mentoring activities, etc).

**Aims and overall approach of the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF)**

Q5. The KEF consultation document describes the overall approach as being an annual, institutional level, largely metrics driven exercise, although noting that narrative will have an important role. More background may be found in the report summarising the recommendations of the technical advisory group.

Do you consider this overall approach to be appropriate?



**Proposed response:** Somewhat Agree

**Proposed explanation:** The consensus from our member business schools is that the metrics are a useful way to provide a descriptive summary of the institutional activities, but they should not be seen as synonymous with the quality of those efforts, nor do they take account of the actual transfer of knowledge: the KEF simply assumes this happened as an outcome of the activity. We reiterate the concern of our members that KPIs in isolation can be misleading and could lead to gaming.

The institutional level focus is helpful in terms of minimising the administration of the data collection and inputs but it may limit the utility of the framework. Knowledge exchange activities often vary dramatically across university faculties and subject areas and the focus on metrics risks missing activity which does not fall neatly into one of the categories. The HE-BCI survey data misses key value-added engagement activities such as student related engagement on consultancy and projects for business. Furthermore, graduate start-up is a weak measure of graduate enterprise as it doesn't measure impact in terms of revenue or survival rates.

Degree Apprenticeships and funded business support programmes, for example, may be generating very substantial knowledge exchange impact but would not be easily discernible from the metrics. The role of the narrative is therefore important but there is a concern that this will, in practice, be viewed as subjective and of secondary importance. An effective narrative will provide context to the KPIs.

We received mixed views from members on the preferred frequency of the KEF exercise, with some viewing an annual approach as sensible whilst others questioned whether this would be necessary

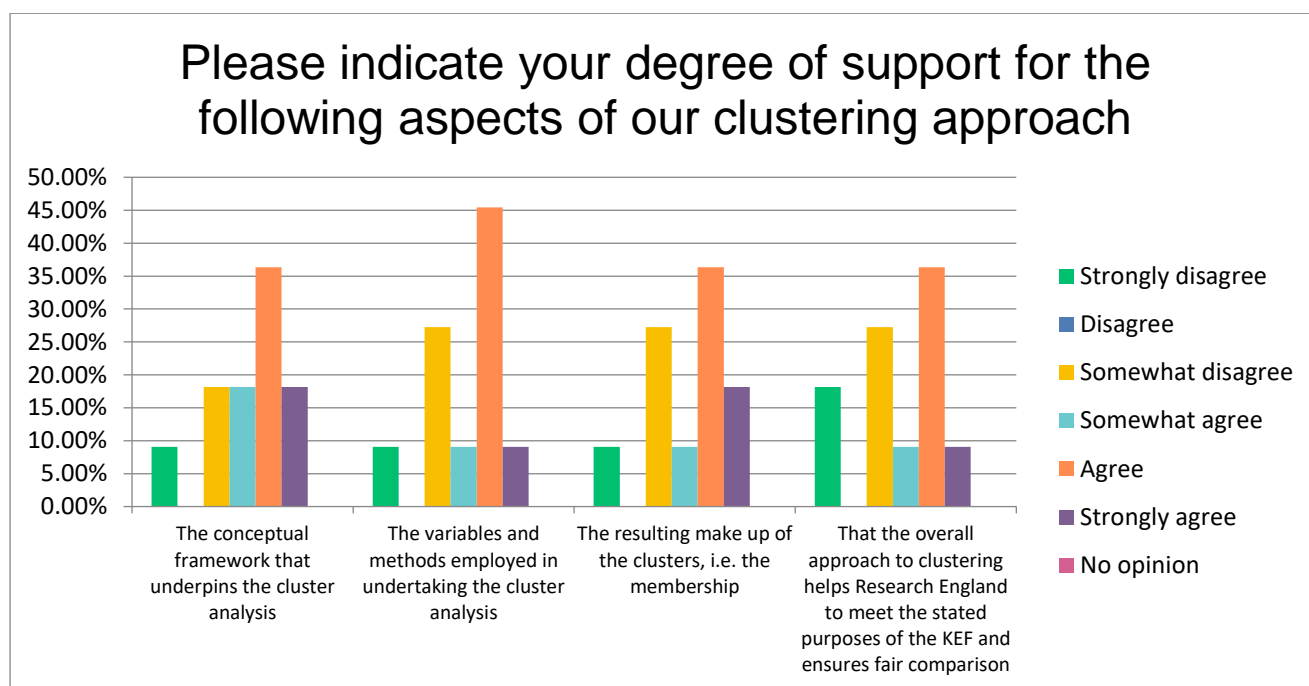
and suggested a less regular assessment cycle similar to REF and TEF. It is worth considering whether the metrics data is likely to vary sufficiently on an annual basis to warrant running the KEF exercise every year.

### **Clustering**

*Q6. The English higher education sector is very diverse. We therefore propose to create clusters of knowledge exchange peer groups. The proposed clusters and clustering approach is detailed in the KEF consultation document. Please use the following questions to provide your feedback on our proposals.*

*Please indicate your degree of support for the following aspects of our clustering approach.*

- *Q6a. The conceptual framework that underpins the cluster analysis.*
- *Q6b. The variables and methods employed in undertaking the cluster analysis.*
- *Q6c. The resulting make up of the clusters, i.e. the membership.*
- *Q6d. That the overall approach to clustering helps Research England to meet the stated purposes of the KEF and ensures fair comparison.*



### **Proposed responses:**

- **Q6a:** Agree
- **Q6b:** Agree
- **Q6c:** Agree
- **Q6d:** Agree

**Proposed explanation:** Broadly speaking our members are in agreement that clustering seems a sensible way to allow for universities to benchmark themselves and work towards improvements, but we received multiple comments that structuring the KEF reporting so that the perspectives are only comparable within clusters could create difficulties. This will especially be the case for external users as businesses are far more likely to wish to compare universities in the same geographical area or with the same subject expertise.

Similarly, at the more detailed level of suggested reporting, it will not be clear whether individual universities are improving in their knowledge exchange activities, except relative to the overall status of their respective clusters. It might be more useful to retain the primary focus on benchmarking within cluster but to also report on overall scoring so that more detailed comparisons can be made.

The socio-economic context does not appear to be accounted for in the metrics used for the clustering and there could perhaps be greater consideration of international reach. The presentation of metrics by cluster group might be confusing to the public and non-academic organisations. It is also not clear whether and to what extent geographic location has been a factor in the clustering. Clustering is arguably a necessity for the KEF and while there can be no perfect way of carrying out such an exercise it is important that the methodology reduces unfair comparisons as much as possible.

### **Perspectives and metrics**

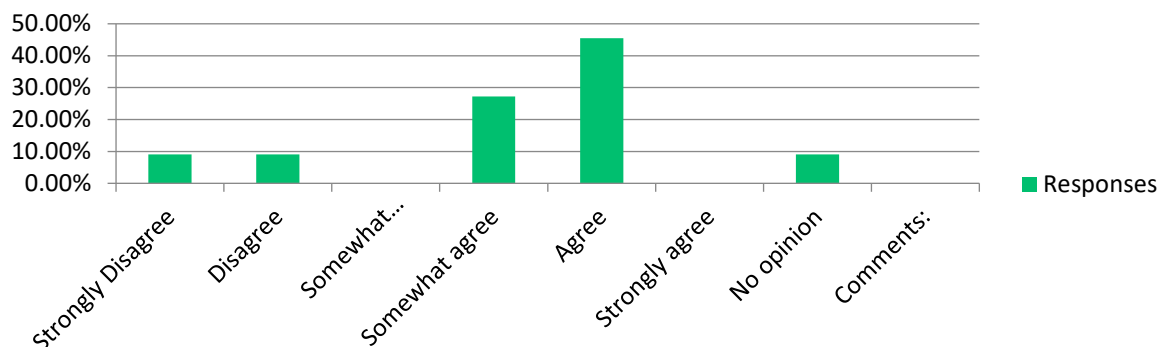
*Knowledge exchange covers an extremely diverse range of activity and it is appropriate that some HEIs will perform more strongly in different areas that align more closely with their mission and strategic goals. We have therefore proposed a range of seven perspectives. The following questions will seek your views on the number and range of perspectives and metrics proposed.*

#### *Perspectives*

- *Research partnerships*
- *Working with business*
- *Working with the public and third sector*
- *Skills, enterprise and entrepreneurship*
- *Local growth and regeneration*
- *IP and commercialisation*
- *Public and community engagement*

*Q7. Taking into account the overall range of perspectives and metrics outlined in the consultation document, do you agree or disagree that a sufficiently broad range of KE activities is captured.*

Taking into account the overall range of perspectives and metrics outlined in the consultation document, do you agree or disagree that a sufficiently broad range of KE activities is captured.



**Proposed response:** Agree

**Proposed explanation:** We broadly agree that the perspectives cover a broad range of knowledge exchange activity. We have some reservations regarding the focus on UK activity and the minimal coverage of international knowledge exchange, particularly in the post-Brexit world. It is also important that narrative is considered alongside the metrics so the exercise is not purely data driven.

*Q7a. Taking into account the range of metrics outlined in the consultation document, please indicate [using a % sliding scale] whether you consider that they adequately represent performance in each of the proposed perspectives.*

Perspective	Average score given by respondents as to whether the metrics in each perspective adequately represent performance (0-100%)	Comments on the balance and coverage of the proposed metrics
Research partnerships	66	Our members feel this set of metrics is too limited and does not differentiate the different kinds of partnerships clearly. It is not clear how international partnerships are accounted for and/or differentiated. The outputs for collaborative authorship should be broad i.e. not limited to traditional REF outlets and include practitioner outputs and different formats (e.g. printed, online, video). As many organisations have employees educated to Masters and PhD levels it is not unreasonable to include co-authorship.



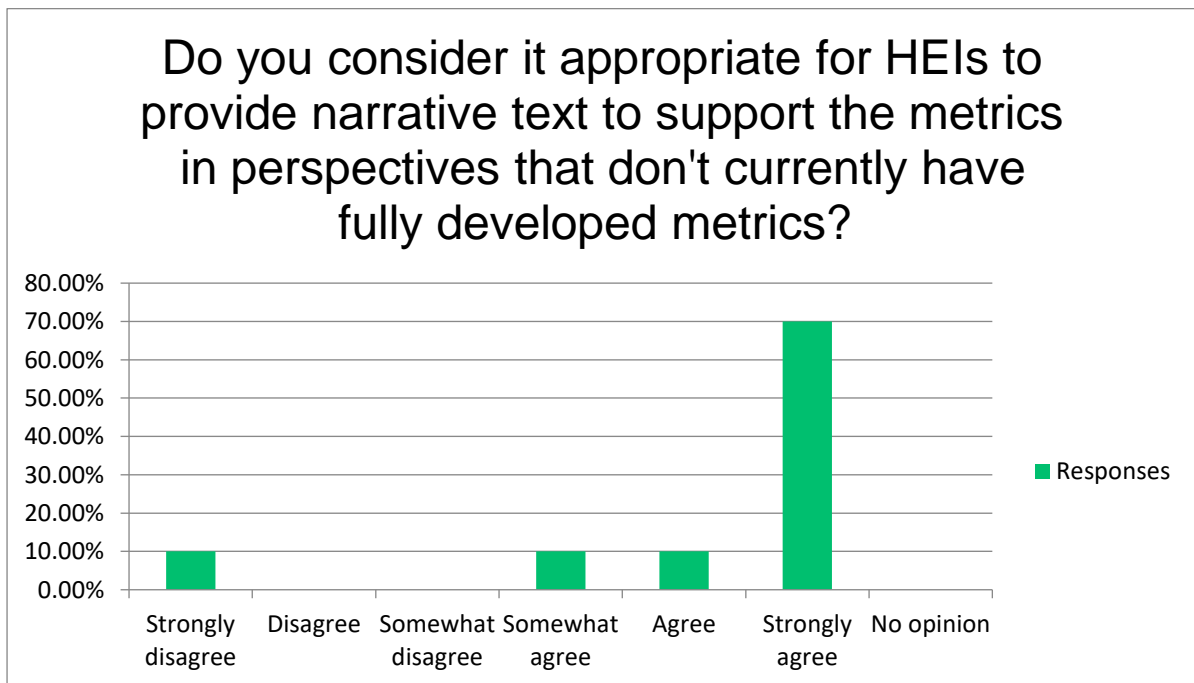
Perspective	Average score given by respondents as to whether the metrics in each perspective adequately represent performance (0-100%)	Comments on the balance and coverage of the proposed metrics
		<p>These metrics should capture the range of methods and funding routes by which collaborative research takes place. There is also a timing issue around the co-authorship metric – as publication may well take place years after the knowledge exchange activity in question.</p>
Working with business	66	<p>The metrics are entirely focussed on income and would not capture many of the other ways in which universities are working with business, such as membership of boards and committees, Degree Apprenticeships, and developing new curricula with business partners. There are many informal relationships with individual faculty members that will not be captured.</p> <p>Options such as match-funded or wholly business funded PhDs/DBAs and student projects should be accounted for. The two-way value of knowledge exchange is not considered e.g. placements are not included but form an important part of working with businesses. Mentoring is also missing.</p> <p>With some refinements, however, the data generated by this perspective could be useful for commercial engagement and the promotion of match-funded collaboration.</p>
Working with the public and third sector	53	<p>The view from our members is that this set of metrics is again too income-based and there are many ways of engaging with the public and third sector that are not captured in accounts of income e.g. student volunteering, placements and mentoring.</p> <p>It is important to note that the third sector in particular is often unable to fund its activity with universities and hence such</p>

Perspective	Average score given by respondents as to whether the metrics in each perspective adequately represent performance (0-100%)	Comments on the balance and coverage of the proposed metrics
		interactions would not be recorded by income-based metrics. The metrics for this perspective need significant reconsideration.
Skills, enterprise and entrepreneurship	66	The suggested metrics are reasonable but they do not consider the level or quality of knowledge/skills gained. Graduate start-up rates is a useful metric but without any follow-up data on survival or growth it could be easily misinterpreted.
Local growth and regeneration	62	<p>The consensus amongst our members is that local growth and regeneration is very difficult to measure and that developing a viable methodology is challenging. The metric suggested is again income-based but regeneration is a complex topic and we cannot assume that outcomes have been achieved because income associated with regeneration was received by a HEI.</p> <p>On balance, our members favour a narrative-based approach which would enable institutions to explain their efforts within the context of their socio-economic environment.</p> <p>As local growth and regeneration activities can again be very broad it is important that informal relationships such as student volunteering, business clinics, internships, etc, are considered within scope.</p>
IP and commercialisation	69	Metrics are better suited to capture activities within this perspective and our members broadly support what is being proposed, with the caveat that STEM oriented universities may benefit disproportionately from some of the metrics.
Public and community engagement	61	More consideration is needed for the metrics proposed for public and community engagement. The metrics do

Perspective	Average score given by respondents as to whether the metrics in each perspective adequately represent performance (0-100%)	Comments on the balance and coverage of the proposed metrics
		<p>not take into account the diversity of the potential activities. The 'Time per academic staff FTE committed to public and community engagement (paid and free)' is acceptable, but should not be restricted to the categories offered, which are skewed towards the arts.</p> <p>We have received several responses questioning whether any metrics should be used for this perspective. It is likely that the measures will rely heavily on the narrative for explanation and may be considerably more open to different interpretations by institutions.</p>

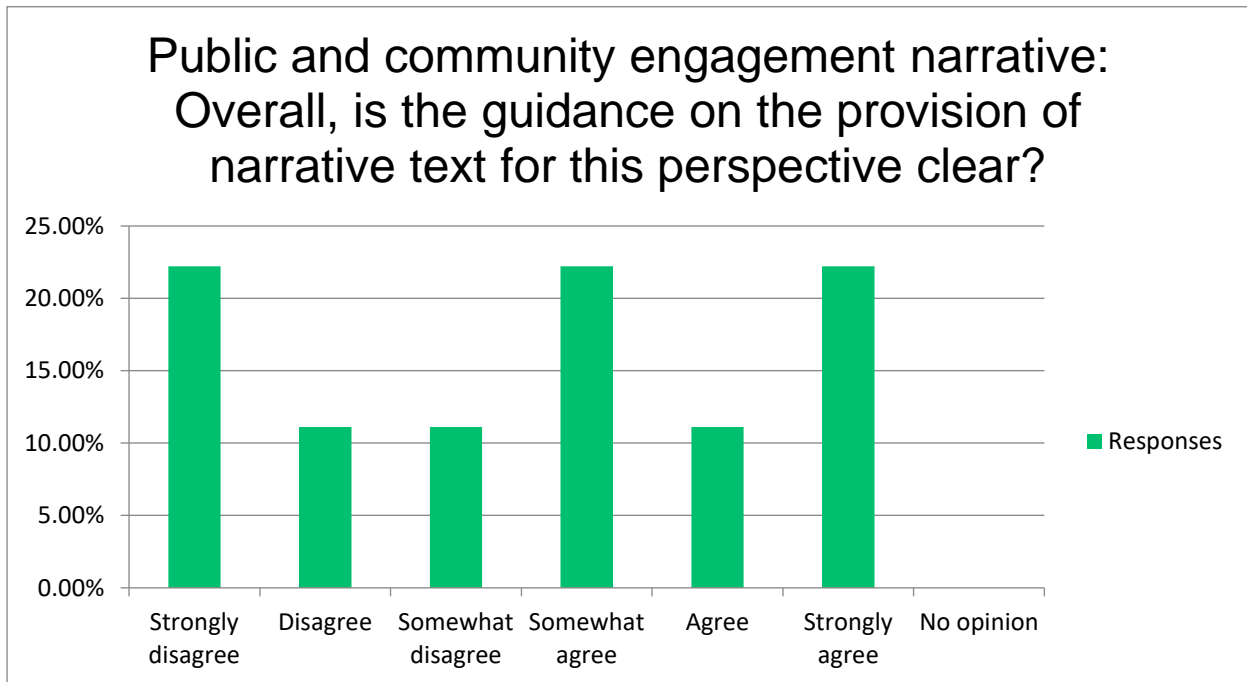
**Supplementary narrative**

Q8. Do you consider it appropriate for HEIs to provide narrative text to support the metrics in perspectives that don't currently have fully developed metrics?



**Proposed response:** Strongly agree

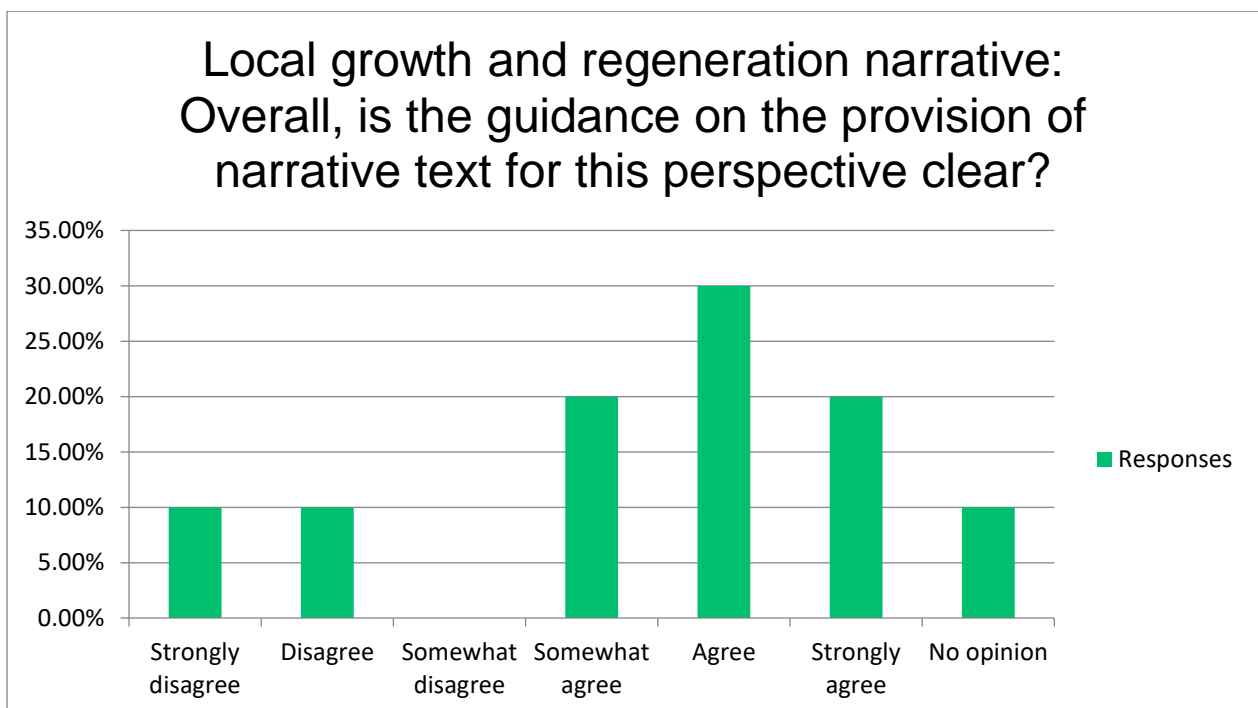
Q8a. Overall, is the guidance on the provision of narrative text for the public and community engagement narrative clear?



**Proposed response:** Somewhat Agree

**Proposed explanation:** Our members welcome the proposed template which allows them to detail their expertise in a fairly short format, although there could perhaps be more detail on the type of outcomes that should be cited.

Q8b. Overall, is the guidance on the provision of narrative text for the local growth and regeneration narrative clear?

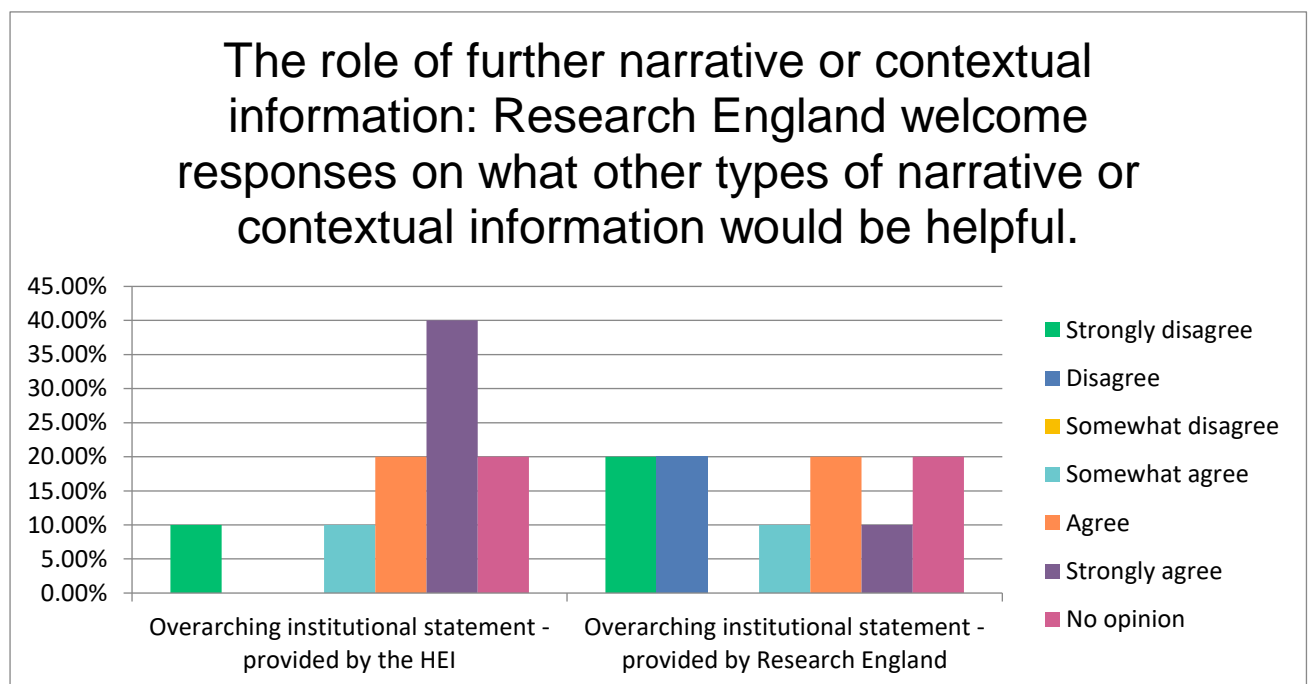


**Proposed response:** Agree

**Proposed explanation:** The guidance provides wide enough scope to support differences of purpose and activity between HEIs, while allowing a standardised form of data collection.

Q8c. We welcome responses on what other types of narrative or contextual information would be helpful.

- Should the HEI or Research England provide other narrative information?
- How should we use other contextual information, such as information on local economic competitiveness described in section 5 of the cluster analysis report?
- Would other perspectives benefit significantly from further narrative information?
- Would the benefit of adding further narrative information be outweighed by the burden of doing so?



**Proposed response for overarching institutional statement provided by the HEI:** Strongly agree

**Proposed response for overarching institutional statement provided by Research England:**  
Somewhat Agree

**Proposed explanation:** The consensus from our member business schools is that further narrative or contextual information would be useful but is better led by the HEI rather than Research England. Consideration should be given to allowing narrative text for all 7 perspectives so that universities can explicate their unique skills and drivers, as well as institutional and faculty/department/subject level activities, which either cannot be captured through HESA data or will not become evident within the annual reporting cycle.

These statements, if short enough, will also be useful for external parties to understand the full picture of knowledge exchange activity in a university and enable comparison. The different operational formats used by universities differ widely and have a direct affect on knowledge exchange performance and activity. A university's local economic environment is also important to

consider within the narrative. A more complete picture will thus be generated if the metrics are combined with additional narrative on the context in which the university operates.

### **Visualisation**

*Q9. Please indicate [using a % slider scale] your level of support for the proposed method of comparison and visualisation*

<b>Proposed method of comparison and visualisation</b>	<b>Average score given by respondents as to whether they support the proposed method of comparison and visualisation (0-100%)</b>
Each of the seven perspectives is to be given equal weighting	59
Metrics under each perspective are to be normalised and summed	73
The performance of each HEI is to be expressed in a radar chart in deciles, relative to the mean average decile of the peer group	57
Perspectives are not intended to be aggregated into a single score	80
Narratives are to be presented alongside the metric score, making it clear that metrics in the two perspectives of Public & Community Engagement and Local Growth & Regeneration are provisional, and should be read in conjunction with the narratives	82
Visualisation is to be delivered through an interactive, online dashboard which will allow exploration of the data underlying the 'headline' results in various ways	86

*Q9a. Please comment on the presentation and visualisation proposals, for example:*

- *where further clarification is required*
- *where refinements could be made*
- *whether there are areas where more consistency across HEIs could be achieved - how narratives could be incorporated?*

**Proposed response:** As mentioned in answers to previous questions, some HEIs will find value in comparing their performance against other HEIs in different clusters but the reporting as proposed will not enable the data to be interrogated in this manner. It would also be interesting to see the trajectories of growth areas in knowledge exchange as measured by the metrics data.

Visualising the data through dashboards can be useful but it is important that it does not lead to simplistic comparisons and evaluations which do not take into account the complexities of a HEI's environment. The focus on income rather than quality is a concern in providing these descriptive overviews.

**Implementation**

*Q10. We will pilot the implementation with a group of HEIs as described in the consultation document. Please provide any comments about the implementation of the KEF.*

Our members feel that the pilot must consist of a good sample of different types of providers and that it must be carefully managed so that the interests of those in the pilot do not unduly shape the final format of the KEF. HEIs should also be given another opportunity to comment on the results of the pilot.