



**Research  
England**

**Office for  
Students**



# **Funding competition for projects on student engagement in knowledge exchange**

**Demonstrating what works for students**

**Issued jointly by the Office for Students and Research England**

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## Summary

1. Research England and the Office for Students (OfS) are launching a joint funding competition for project proposals to demonstrate the benefits to higher education students and graduates through their involvement in knowledge exchange activities. We are interested in projects that can provide evidence of the effectiveness and impact to the student as well as the external partner, and exemplars of good practice, which can provide transferable insights across the higher education sector. Together we are making available up to £10 million for this scheme. A minimum of £250k and a maximum of £1 million is available for the successful projects. The funding is revenue only; funding is not to be used for equipment or infrastructure costs.
2. The focus of knowledge exchange (KE) is to deliver economic and societal benefits to external partners, as well as benefiting students themselves. However, we have not focused to date on explicitly understanding, measuring and articulating the effective practice in KE that delivers positive student benefits. This makes it harder to identify the scale of their experience and contribution, the benefits they receive, and the mutual benefits with external partners. We also want to understand how these could be spread more widely across the higher education sector through sharing effective practice. Better evidence on student benefits and the student experience could demonstrate return on investment and optimise the future use of Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) funding, thereby improving value for money for public funds.

## Who can apply? (Eligibility for funding)

3. This funding opportunity is open to higher education providers who:
  - a. are in the 'Approved (fee cap)' category of the OfS Register as at 26 September 2019<sup>1</sup>
  - b. are eligible for Research England (RE) funding, as detailed in RE's published terms and conditions<sup>2</sup>
  - c. have a track record in KE activity. Bidders will need to make their case for this as part of their bid.<sup>3</sup>
4. Other providers can be involved in proposals as part of a collaboration or consortium.
5. Activities to be funded must meet the definition of KE set out in the latest HEIF guidance<sup>4</sup>; that is, focused on external linkages and economic and societal benefits.

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/the-register/the-ofs-register/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/the-register/the-ofs-register/)

<sup>2</sup> See <http://re.ukri.org/news-events-publications/publications/terms-and-conditions-of-research-england-grant1/>

<sup>3</sup> The HE-BCI survey is a useful source for evidencing a track record in KE. See <https://re.ukri.org/knowledge-exchange/the-he-bci-survey/>

<sup>4</sup> Available at: <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20170110115301/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2016/201616/>

## How to apply (bidding process)

6. To apply for this funding, complete the bid template (Annex A)<sup>5</sup> and email it to [studentke@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:studentke@officeforstudents.org.uk) by **1700 on Friday 13 December 2019**.
7. To avoid unnecessary duplication, the OfS will handle the bids and share this information with RE. For the successful projects, the funding awards will be made by RE, and RE will lead on the monitoring of projects sharing the information provided with the OfS.
8. Funding will be awarded to the successful proposals on the following basis:
  - a. We will allocate between £250,000 and £1 million per project, though we expect bids requesting the full amount to involve collaborations across at least two higher education providers.
  - b. We expect an appropriate level of co-investment to be provided by the higher education providers and external partners involved in the bid. This will demonstrate evidence of commitment to the project, and to risk-sharing, alongside any OfS and RE funding.
  - c. We anticipate funding a number of projects to explore the widest range of interventions and activities across the broadest portfolio possible. The final number of funded projects will depend on the quality of bids received, available funding, and the judgements and recommendations made through the assessment process.
  - d. Providers may be involved in up to two bids, with each collaborative bid requiring an eligible lead provider for funding purposes (see paragraph 3). Providers may not act as the lead on more than one bid. Providers not yet eligible for OfS or RE funding can be partners in bids.
9. Projects must run for up to two years' duration. There is no minimum duration, but we will only fund viable projects which will deliver value for money and which, according to the consideration and judgements through the assessment process, most effectively meet our priorities and criteria. Funding will be provided during the period from April 2020 to April 2022.
10. We expect projects to articulate a robust evaluation strategy for activities within their proposals, and to include within that a plan for dissemination of lessons learned.

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<sup>5</sup> The bid template (Annex A) is available at: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-engagement-in-ke-funding-competition/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-engagement-in-ke-funding-competition/)

## Timeframe

Date	Activity
22 October 2019	Open meeting for interested bidders held in London
1700 on 13 December 2019	Deadline for bids
January 2020	Assessment process
February 2020	Panel meeting to review and recommend bids for funding Decisions, and communication to bidders
April 2020	Funding available Projects must have commenced
April 2022	Projects must conclude; funding ends
October 2022	End of project reports due

# Criteria

11. We will support a variety of project activities, across a range of different KE approaches (not just those specifically focused on students and graduates, but also where students and graduates are key participants). We want to support a high-quality portfolio of projects that deliver and demonstrate activities across different types of providers, places, subjects, sectors, student groups, and KE activities.
12. We will fund projects that:
  - a. improve the student benefits or support more students to benefit,
  - b. ensure effective practice is shared for the benefit of the whole sector,
  - c. contribute to better understanding of effective practice and how this could shape future policy in this area,
  - d. deliver value for money for RE and OfS, demonstrated through:
    - i. proportionate level of co-investment provided
    - ii. scale of deliverables and intended outcomes
    - iii. anticipated effectiveness of the proposed approach
    - iv. potential learning for the wider higher education sector and for policy development.
13. Bids should meet **one** or more of the following OfS and RE priorities:
  - a. To provide evidence of the ways in which KE activities involve or benefit students or graduates directly, or demonstrate approaches that optimise student benefit for a given activity.
  - b. To demonstrate effective practice in KE that benefits students and to make such knowledge available to the wider higher education sector.
  - c. To address evidenced issues of equality of opportunity and diversity and inclusion within existing KE activities that create barriers to students from all backgrounds benefiting from them.
14. We would like to see as wide a range of activities as possible across the portfolio of funded projects. These might include:
  - a. involving students in consultancy or other activities with business and community partners
  - b. engaging students and graduates in enterprise and entrepreneurship activities, including in start-ups and spin-out activities
  - c. the role and contribution of students and graduates in local economic development

- d. the role and contribution of students and graduates in civic, social or anchor roles of universities
  - e. exploiting employer links for student benefits
  - f. providing lessons for what has worked for certain students in particular environments
  - g. innovations which deliver changes from existing practice
  - h. projects that scale up existing or planned activities or test them on different student groups
  - i. evaluation of activities to propose methodologies for demonstrating student benefits or illuminate effectiveness of particular practices.
15. Although the focus is on benefits to students and graduates, bids may include additional activities articulating the benefits to external partners that go alongside the student benefits. Bids that incorporate learning from KE practice outside the UK would be particularly welcomed. We expect effective practice to include those responding to and informed by the needs of the specific student populations, such as those with protected characteristics<sup>6</sup>.
16. Activities focused solely on student or graduate benefits from internal higher education provider activity (teaching or research), without external linkages, are not eligible. Bids focused solely on research, staff, or the university estate are also out of scope.
17. All eligible proposals will be considered against our priorities and criteria.

## **Assessment and monitoring**

18. Bids will be assessed internally by both OfS and RE officers in the first instance. A panel of external experts will then review the process and consider which bids should be recommended for funding. The panel will particularly consider our aim to fund a portfolio of projects (considering our key objectives including regional spread, diversity of providers, diversity of KE activities, and diversity of student groups involved). Please note that all bids will be shared across RE and the OfS, and with the expert panel as necessary.
19. The panel will reserve the right to call bidders for interview, where this would help inform final recommendations. We will contact any bidders directly if an interview is required.
20. Following the panel's recommendations, final decisions on funding will be made by both the Executive Chair of RE and the Chief Executive of the OfS.
21. Funded proposals will be subject to individual monitoring arrangements depending on the level of funding awarded and our assessment of risk. We will issue award letters setting out the terms and conditions of the funding, which must be formally agreed before funding payments start. We will take a risk-based, proportionate approach to monitoring, to ensure value for money and the delivery of targets, objectives, outputs and outcomes. We will undertake visits

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on protected characteristics, see <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/4>

to and meetings with projects to better understand the activities, impacts and outcomes and to support analysis and dissemination.

22. The funded projects will be required to form a network, to share information and learning between themselves and with RE and the OfS. RE may commission an analysis of all bids to gather information about KE activity with students from across the sector. The OfS will commission an independent evaluation of the competition and will notify the successful bidders of this work accordingly. We expect all funded bidders to work with us and the evaluators in an open and transparent way throughout, to share expertise, learning and effective practice for the benefit of students and the wider higher education sector, and to provide detailed analysis of successful and unsuccessful activities to understand lessons learnt. RE and the OfS will work together throughout this scheme to avoid unnecessary duplication of reporting and evaluation arrangements.
23. All bidders must engage with the programme evaluator who will work to identify outcome indicators, successes and challenges across the portfolio. We recognise that this funding competition, and its evaluation, will capture only a small amount of the overall activity supported by HEIF funding and broader KE activity happening across the sector. The evaluation of this initiative is intended to produce insights that could be embedded within KE funding, and approaches to KE that would enhance and articulate better the returns on investment from public funds.

## More about knowledge exchange

**Knowledge exchange (KE)** is defined broadly in the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 as, in relation to science, technology, humanities or new ideas, a process or other activity by which knowledge is exchanged, and that the exchange contributes, or is likely to contribute (whether directly or indirectly) to an economic or social benefit in the United Kingdom or elsewhere.

24. Universities in the UK undertake a broad range of KE activities, generating income of over £4.5 billion, with external investment in spin-out and start-up companies (including several thousand graduate start-ups) reaching over £1.6 billion, and employing over 50,000 people.
25. These activities must deliver external benefits. KE activities should also be sustainable, including through delivering on the higher education provider's other core activities of research and teaching. This could be demonstrated through, for example, the development of specific skills and attributes that will improve students' employability, experience and contact gained in enterprise, and exposure to people and communities with different backgrounds, identities and perspectives.
26. To support KE, RE and the OfS allocate funding through HEIF. We use a formula to allocate funds to eligible providers. HEIF is intended 'to support and develop a broad range of knowledge-based interactions between universities and the wider world, which result in benefits to the economy and society'<sup>7</sup>. It is supported from the Science Budget and the National Productivity Investment Fund<sup>8</sup> (currently approximately £163 million), together with £47 million from the Department for Education. These contributions from science and education budgets reflect providers' competences in both research and teaching. This encourages providers to form links that address particular needs in the economy and society.
27. HEIF supports a diverse set of activities that involves or benefits students, including:
  - a. specific student-facing support (such as support for graduate start-ups)
  - b. employer links that may inform practice-informed teaching (as well as research partnerships)
  - c. student involvement in academically-led activities (for example, students as employees of spin-out companies or as contributing to consulting practices)
  - d. other activities that involve students in attracting businesses and other users to benefit from higher education, such as in local economic development.

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://re.ukri.org/knowledge-exchange/the-higher-education-innovation-fund-heif/>

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/productivity-budget-2018-brief>

## Next steps

28. To apply for this funding, complete the bid template (Annex A), available to download from our website<sup>9</sup>. Email the bid proposal to [studentke@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:studentke@officeforstudents.org.uk) by **1700 on Friday 13 December 2019**.
29. We are holding an open forum for interested bidders to find out more information. This will take place on 22 October in London. Sign up at: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/events/student-engagement-in-ke-open-forum/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/events/student-engagement-in-ke-open-forum/)
30. If you have any questions about this competition, please email [studentke@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:studentke@officeforstudents.org.uk).

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<sup>9</sup> The bid template is available at: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-engagement-in-ke-funding-competition/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-engagement-in-ke-funding-competition/)



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