

# Concordat for the advancement of knowledge exchange in higher education

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# Foreword

**Universities and higher education providers have long worked with businesses, the public sector and local communities to deliver real world impacts. However, efforts need to be stepped up to deliver the UK Government's R&D 2.4% target and tackle challenges such as levelling up prosperity across the country.**

I welcome the initiative taken by the higher education sector to set itself high standards in knowledge exchange and commit to a long-term programme of continuous improvement, engagement and capacity building in their Knowledge Exchange activities, through the Knowledge Exchange Concordat. I am particularly grateful to Professor Trevor McMillan, the Vice-Chancellor of Keele University, who has led this agenda for some years, and is now bringing it to fruition. The focus in the Concordat on higher education leaders developing and nurturing their staff and students to engage with the wider world is vitally important, as well as on making their campuses, facilities and expertise more accessible to local and external partners.

The Concordat has been a valuable exercise in joint working of universities, higher education representative bodies and the higher education funding bodies across the UK, strengthening good practice for the system as a whole. In England I see the Concordat, alongside the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) being developed by Research England, as a critical part of the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) funding programme. I am delighted to endorse the principles outlined in the document and to congratulate all those whose hard work has brought the initiative to this stage.

**Amanda Solloway**

Minister for Science, Research and Innovation

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# Introduction

## Universities and other providers of higher education and research are major contributors to society and the economy at local, national and international levels.


A key and growing part of the role of universities is proactive knowledge exchange (KE), which is defined as a collaborative, creative endeavour that translates knowledge and research into impact in society and the economy. Knowledge exchange includes a set of activities, processes and skills that enable close collaboration between universities and partner organisations to deliver commercial, environmental, cultural and place-based benefits, opportunities for students and increased prosperity.

By growing and evolving this role universities will continue to provide innovation, leadership and high-quality support in a wide range of KE activities that enhance the communities and organisations they work with. This KE concordat provides a mechanism by which universities can consider their performance in KE and make a commitment to improvement in those areas that are consistent with their priorities and expertise.

The aim of this KE concordat is therefore to give universities and their staff, students and partners a clarity of mission that allows them to succeed in knowledge exchange in a supportive environment.

It is well recognised that there is not a single model of KE that is appropriate for all institutions, so the concordat does not provide a prescribed recipe for effective KE in all situations. Rather it sets out possible routes to good practice in processes and approaches that would enable universities to fulfil a KE role whether across the whole spread of their disciplines or for specific activities and relationships.

Within England, the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) will provide data and analysis that can form the backbone of the development of the institutional approach to the KE concordat. Across the UK the KE concordat will also inform relevant funding approaches by providing assurance on value being delivered from public funds. Engagement with the concordat demonstrates to governments and other agencies that universities are committed to a wide range of high quality activities that enhance communities, society and the economy. It will also provide a vehicle for engagement of economic and societal partners in the contribution of universities. Universities in the UK are recognised for their academic excellence and the impact they have on society. The KE concordat aims to enhance this reputation through continuous evolution and improvement of the KE we do and how we do it.



**Knowledge exchange** includes a set of activities, processes and skills that enable close collaboration between universities and partner organisations

### Professor Trevor McMillan

Vice-Chancellor, Keele University

Chair, UUK/Research England KE Concordat Task and Finish Group

Chair, Research England KE Framework Steering Group

## The higher education sector engages in a wide range of KE activities.

We work in partnership with businesses and the third sector to apply key research, scientific, technological, medical and cultural breakthroughs, through developing key skills and attributes such as entrepreneurship, creativity, teamwork and communication that drive productivity and growth, to supporting company start-ups by students and staff.

The data collected annually through the HE–BCI survey demonstrates the impressive scale of knowledge exchange activity across all types of institutions, and the UK Industrial Strategy (BEIS, 2017) recognises the importance of universities and colleges to future economic and social growth. The commitment of the UK government to the 2.4% target for research and development spending demonstrates the value of higher education knowledge exchange. To support the implementation of this commitment and the effective and accountable investment of planned additional funding, we believe that the sector should enhance and improve its KE practice and demonstrate its KE strengths. The aim of the concordat is to enable institutions to do this in a clear, flexible and appropriate way.

The KE concordat provides a key opportunity for the sector to demonstrate effective strategic leadership of KE within institutions, outline the KE activity and practice that are relevant to their strengths and circumstances, identify where improvements or innovation might add value, and support staff to develop. It also enables the sector to promote the many different forms of KE and business partnerships that are flourishing in an increasingly diverse higher education sector.

The UK government is committed to the

**2.4%**

target for research and development spending

### Alistair Jarvis

Chief Executive Officer,  
Universities UK

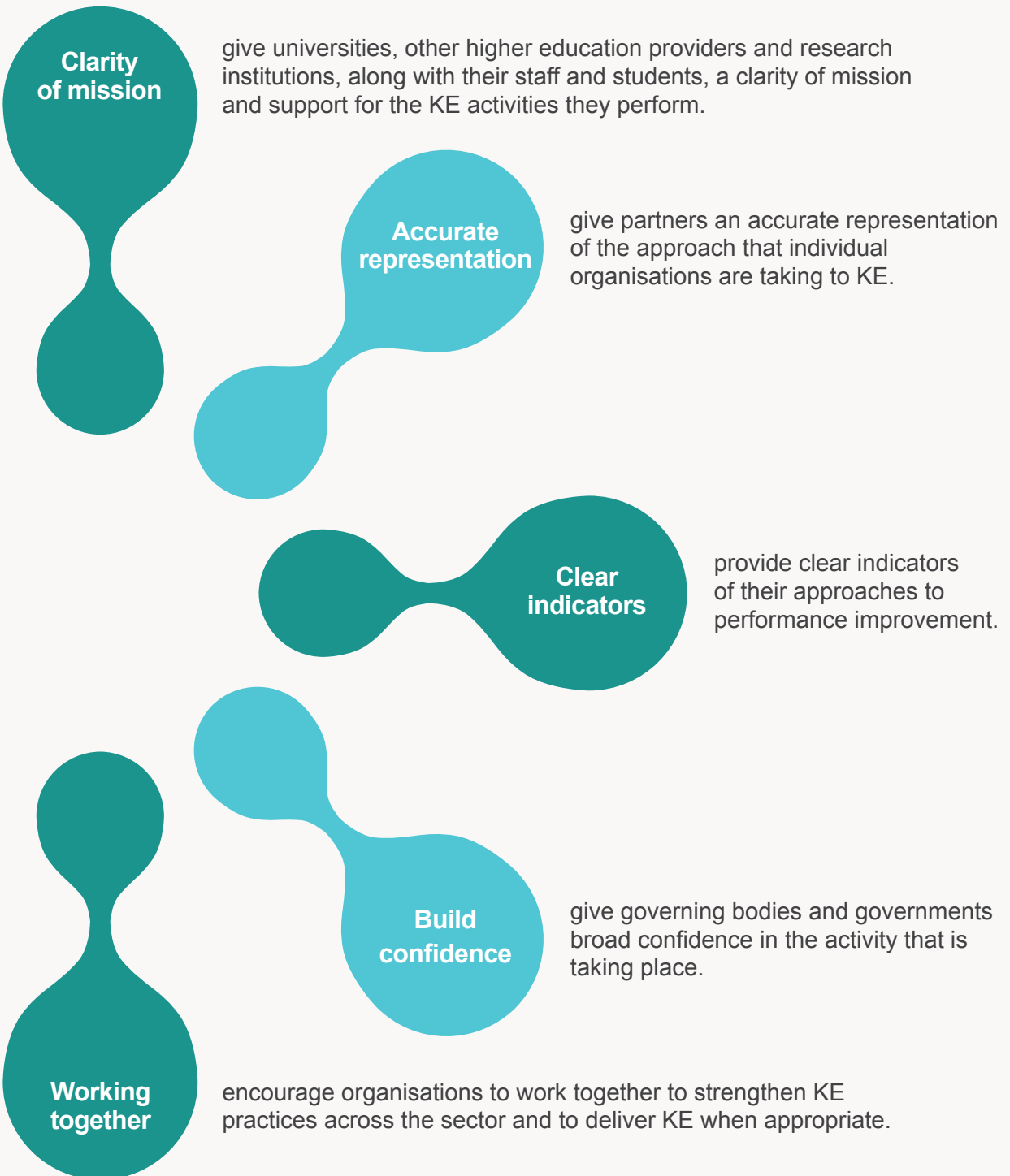
### Gordon McKenzie

Chief Executive Officer,  
GuildHE

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# Aims

The knowledge exchange concordat is designed to:



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# The knowledge exchange concordat

## The eight guiding principles:

### 1 Mission

Knowledge exchange is a recognised part of the overall institutional strategy and is valued for the social, cultural and economic outcomes it helps us achieve. We have a clear understanding of the institutional role and the purpose of KE, including recognition of the needs and interests of potential and current partners and beneficiaries, ensuring a commitment to inclusivity and equality. Clarity of mission is essential for efficient and effective KE. Staff, students and external organisations need to understand the aims and priorities of the institution's senior leaders and governors in relation to the whole range of KE activities undertaken by the institution.

### 2 Policies and processes

Where appropriate, we have clear policies on the types of KE that we undertake and work with staff, students, collaborators and beneficiaries so that the policies are understood and operationalised. Institutions could provide evidence of a clear set of policies covering those areas of KE central to the institution's mission and values, and consistent with its charitable status and aims.

### 3 Engagement

We build effective relationships by having clear routes to access information and expertise in the university, with engagement mechanisms and policies developed to suit the needs of a wide range of beneficiaries and partners working with institutions as publicly funded bodies.

### 4 Working transparently and ethically

We make sure that our partners and beneficiaries understand the ethical and charitable regulatory environments in which our institution operates, including a commitment to inclusivity and equality, and we take steps to maximise the benefit to them within that context.

### 5 Capacity building

We ensure that our staff and students are developed and trained appropriately to understand and undertake their roles and responsibilities in the delivery of successful KE.

### 6 Recognition and rewards

We recognise and reward the achievements of staff and students who perform high quality KE activities.

## **7 Continuous improvement**

We proactively strive to share best practice with our peers and have established processes for learning from this.

## **8 Evaluating success**

We undertake regular institutional and collective monitoring and review of our strengthening KE performance using this concordat and through regional, national or international benchmarks to inform the development and execution of a programme of continuous improvement so that KE becomes more effective.



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## Enablers

**For each principle, a set of possible enablers is proposed below. These are examples of good practice and give an indication of the sort of activities that could contribute towards the achievement of the aims of the concordat. They will evolve and be added to as part of the approach to spreading best practice as the KE concordat is implemented.**

- The enablers should not be considered as a prescribed set of activities, and they do not represent a checklist against which universities can be judged.
- There is no intrinsic hierarchy to the enablers an institution chooses to address: they should be chosen to best suit the institution's own KE strategy.
- Institutions are free to develop their own enablers that best reflect their KE priorities.



## Principle 1

# Mission

Knowledge exchange is a recognised part of the overall institutional strategy and is valued for the social, cultural and economic outcomes it helps us achieve. We have a clear understanding of the institutional role and the purpose of KE, including recognition of the needs and interests of potential and current partners and beneficiaries, ensuring a commitment to inclusivity and equality.

Clarity of mission is essential for efficient and effective KE. Staff, students and external organisations need to understand the aims and priorities of the institution's senior leaders and governors in relation to the whole range of KE activities undertaken by the institution.

### Key enablers could include:

- **a strategy** relating to KE is developed in consultation with staff, students and key partners and is accountable to senior leaders of the institution. It will be regularly reported on and updated following institutional consultation and approval by governing bodies
- **a clear statement** exists concerning the modes of KE that are a priority and hence supported in the context of an underpinning institutional strategy and priorities; the statement explains how the benefit will be maximised for wider societal outcomes at local and national levels and social and cultural benefit should be considered alongside economic benefit
- **a clear recognition of the role of key partners in KE** and the reciprocal benefits this can bring to all parties involved through co-creation of strategy and approach
- where this is a KE objective, **a published statement** is made on the nature of the civic/regional leadership role of the institution within its place-based contexts, including its role in bringing together public, private and third-sector organisations into a wider KE ecosystem
- **a defined approach** to both academic and professional leadership roles within the senior management team, and to how institutional accountabilities relating to KE are overseen by the institution's governing body
- **an evidenced approach** to sustainable institutional investment to meet agreed institutional KE objectives that demonstrates full consideration of maximising opportunities for the efficient, effective and shared use of both human and capital assets
- **a clear commitment** to provide routes and support for students to engage with all aspects of KE, including enterprise and entrepreneurship, with due consultation with students on the approach



## Principle 2

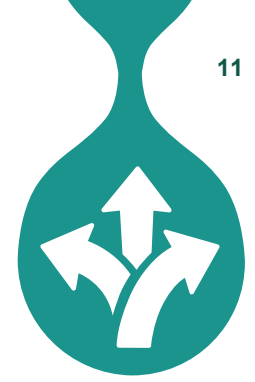
# Policies and processes

Where appropriate, we have clear policies on types of KE that we undertake and work with staff, students, collaborators and beneficiaries so that the policies are understood and operationalised. A well-defined set of relevant policies ensures that all parties engaged in KE have a good mutual understanding of how the institution values KE activity.

Institutions could provide evidence of a clear set of policies covering those areas of KE central to the institution's mission and values, and consistent with its charitable status and aims.

These might include formal mechanisms and policies covering:

- **exploitation of intellectual property (IP)**, including licensing and spinouts, shareholdings, revenue-sharing, and support available
- **access to specialist facilities**, including costing and pricing, access and availability, and attendant support
- **employer engagement**, including how student and graduate talent can be accessed and by which mechanisms
- **arrangements for collaborative and contracted research**, covering cost and revenue sharing of IP exploitation, warranties and indemnities
- **engagement of**, and with, the public on research and the broader activities of the university
- **consultancy and advice**, including formal policies on the provision of advice by individual academic staff on a private or institutional basis
- **continuing professional development (CPD)** and employer engagement in course development and delivery, including a clear approach to accreditation and quality assurance, and the potential for customised provision
- **regeneration and local business support**, including policies on preferential access to services and facilities, institutional collaboration locally, and partnerships with local authorities and local and regional economic development structures and/or devolved administrations
- **state aid**, liability insurance, research and development tax credits and other technical and legal matters
- **mechanisms** for ensuring awareness and compliance with these policies within the institution



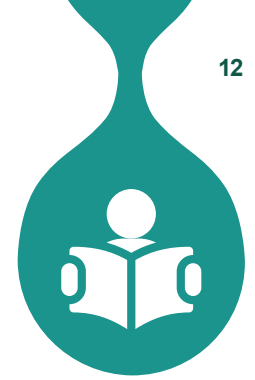
## Principle 3

# Engagement

**We build effective relationships by having clear routes to access information and expertise in the university with engagement mechanisms and policies developed to suit the needs of a wide range of beneficiaries and partners working with institutions as publicly funded bodies.**

### Key enablers could include:

- **a clear route** for external parties to access a defined point of initial contact
- published guidance is available on how **formal enquiries are triaged** and responded to within effective timescales
- published guidance is available on how **informal relationships should be managed** in the context of internal policies, including when formal agreements should be explored
- published guidance is available on how **relationships with external parties are managed** to professionally accepted standards in order to deliver high levels of partner confidence
- formal agreements (in plain language) to cover any substantive KE work undertaken to ensure that everyone's **rights and responsibilities are clear**, and that everyone is clear about what to expect from each other
- formal arrangements for **timely and efficient execution of agreements** and mechanisms to monitor this to inform improved service delivery
- a formal approach exists to **understanding and growing the depth and breadth of relationships** with particular partners, sectors and stakeholder groups, and for the management of relationships with multiple institutional touch points
- **support systems** are in place to ensure that arrangements are used effectively



## Principle 4

# Working transparently and ethically

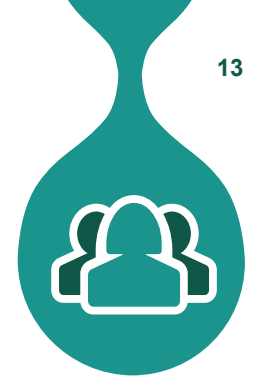
We make sure that our partners and beneficiaries understand the ethical and charitable regulatory environments in which our institution operates, including a commitment to inclusivity and equality, and we take steps to maximise the benefit to them within that context.

### Key enablers could include:

- communication to beneficiaries on the **institutional approach** to KE and collaboration as publicly funded institutions is clear and within legal guidelines and requirements
- published and transparent policies exist on **intellectual property rights (IPR)**, liabilities and warranties in relation to access by third parties as a result of licensing agreements or the outcomes of collaborative research
- where relevant, there is **clear communication to partners and/or beneficiaries** on the requirements upon it as a charitable organisation to use IP arising from KE for non-commercial teaching, research or professional practice, also stating the importance of publishing the outcomes of research and KE, supported by public investment
- published mechanisms are used to **assure the ethical integrity and quality** of its research, teaching and KE, and which reserve the right to decline work that cannot meet these standards
- there is **respect for partner confidentiality**, including in the use of appropriate formal agreements
- formal mechanisms are in place to ensure that where we cannot provide solutions that we can **refer opportunities to those in our networks** who can

## Principle 5

# Capacity building



**We ensure that our staff and students are developed and trained appropriately to understand and undertake their roles and responsibilities in the delivery of successful KE.**

### Institutions could provide evidence that:

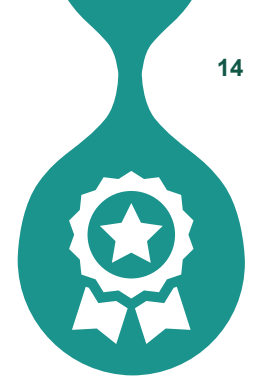
- **established institutional approaches** are used to obtain full value from developing and fostering a diverse workforce in an inclusive environment

### For professional staff supporting KE:

- appropriately experienced and/or qualified and/or accredited KE professionals are recruited who demonstrate aptitude and the **ability to broker and manage KE activities** and an understanding of commercial and academic drivers
- there is a commitment to, and evidence of, **continuous development of KE staff** at all levels of their career through formal training, mentoring, sharing best practice and engagement in relevant networks and communities
- **regular reviews of performance** take place, including feedback from external partners
- there is a clear and evidenced approach to **ensuring the professional standards of staff members** within professional KE teams, eg through processes for accreditation, peer review and staff exchange

### For academic staff and students:

- **KE policy and practice** form part of staff induction and ongoing staff development programmes
- **accessible and appropriate training** supports KE activities, including due consideration of staff induction and formal academic practice development programmes
- there is accessible and appropriately promoted **professional and administrative support** to academic colleagues in furtherance of their KE activities
- there is **accessible and appropriately promoted support** for staff and students wanting to establish and grow new enterprises or activities
- accessible and appropriately promoted **skills training exists for students** who are expected to engage with non-academic partners on behalf of the institution as part of their curricular or non-curricular activities
- approaches for the **development of KE and entrepreneurship skills** in curricular and non-curricular student activities are clearly identified, for both undergraduate and postgraduate students



## Principle 6

# Recognition and rewards

**We recognise and reward the achievements of staff and students who perform high quality KE activities.**

### Key enablers could include:

- clear indicators of what is considered **high-quality KE** within the context of the institution's strategy and good practice standards
- defined approaches to recognising and rewarding successful and innovative KE activities and outcomes within **promotions criteria and reward processes** for academic and professional services staff
- defined approaches to institutional recognition of successful KE by academic staff and students **via processes other than formal promotion and reward**, such as revenue-sharing policies, staff prizes and the celebration of success stories
- a published approach to how **KE activities are recognised within workloads** and rewarded with time allocations appropriately
- **clear reporting processes** allow the institution to know whether its policies are being followed
- approaches towards recognition and rewards that **celebrate institutional achievements** as well as those of individuals



## Principle 7

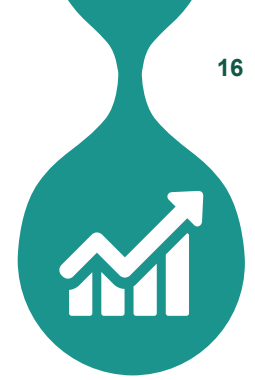
# Continuous improvement

We proactively strive to share best practice with our peers and have established processes for learning from this.

### Institutions could provide evidence of the following:

- there is a formal approach to the use of beneficiary and partner feedback to **drive improvements** in KE performance
- active engagement takes place with national and international organisations in order to **support sharing** of best practice
- there is a defined approach to learning from outside the higher education sector by **engagement with public and private stakeholders**, including government, local authorities, enterprise partnerships and industry/business representative bodies, including through their representation on advisory and institutional governing bodies
- a commitment is made to recognising and **using objective benchmarking** measures to improve KE performance, including the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) in England, and other appropriate evidence-based international benchmarks and quality standards
- a commitment is made to considering the role of external peer review of **KE performance improvement**, informed by KE performance as described in England by the KEF
- published mechanisms show **how the institution manages the quality of KE**, taking into account the range of KE activities that the institution has prioritised, including the use of recognised quality management processes, formal procedures on how feedback is used to improve KE quality, complaints procedures, and arrangements for the timely and efficient execution of agreements and mechanisms





## Principle 8

# Evaluating success

**We undertake regular institutional and collective monitoring and review of our strengthening KE performance using this concordat and through regional, national or international benchmarks to inform the development and execution of a programme of continuous improvement so that KE becomes more effective.**

### Key enablers could include:

- a commitment to carrying out **regular self-assessment** against the concordat and development of an improvement plan covering:
  - regular reporting on KE activity to the institution's governing body
  - benchmarked evidence of scope and scale of services (for example using KEF metrics)
  - third-party evidence of the value of interventions, such as that derived from customer satisfaction surveys
  - how KE policies are being promoted and followed across the institution
  - the quality of service delivery derived from meeting management benchmarks or targets
- third-party **evidence of the contributions** that institutional KE makes at local, national or global levels
- periodic governing body review and **approval of KE policies** and KE performance and improvement plans, and assurance of their efficacy via established institutional programmes such as internal audit

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## Commitments of higher education signatories

**When the concordat is fully implemented, organisations that sign up commit to:**

- making it clear to staff, students and partners what they will do, what they expect within universities and other providers of higher education and research and how they expect to work with partners
- the regular evaluation of approaches and processes to ensure continuous improvement in what is done
- adopting the principles outlined in the KE concordat as a framework for effective knowledge exchange
- publicly committing to the KE concordat
- conducting a self-evaluation of their KE strategy and practice, using the KE concordat
- producing and publishing a short action plan that identifies priorities, good and innovative practice, and areas where improvement is needed
- considering and responding to feedback and advice from the Independent Panel

**For further details of the implementation of the KE concordat and how to sign up for it, please go to:**

**[www.keconcordat.ac.uk](http://www.keconcordat.ac.uk)**



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# Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the many individuals and organisations that have aided the development of this concordat through input to the consultations. In particular, we would like to thank the following who made specific contributions to the drafting of the knowledge exchange concordat:

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[www.keconcordat.ac.uk](http://www.keconcordat.ac.uk)