



## **PraxisAuril and ARMA: joint statement in response to the KE Concordat consultation, 1 July 2019**

This response is submitted jointly by PraxisAuril and ARMA. Drafting of the response was led by Tamsin Mann, Head of Policy, PraxisAuril.

- PraxisAuril has been closely involved in the development of the KE Concordat. Both Sean Fielding, Director of Innovation, Impact and Business, University of Exeter (current PraxisAuril Chair) and Tony Raven, CEO of Cambridge Enterprise, were members of the Concordat drafting group.
- ARMA has been in active discussion with key stakeholders including Research England and Innovate UK and contributed to national discussion with NCUB, GuildHE, PraxisAuril, NCCPE and UUK.
- Together PraxisAuril and ARMA represent a significant proportion of the professional support for business engagement and research collaboration in UK universities and have a critical role to play in implementation of the Concordat.
- This summary response to the KE Concordat consultation reflects our perspective on the opportunities and challenges that the Concordat, and associated metrics, presents for our members and member institutions.

### **Welcome recognition for Knowledge Exchange**

Just like the KEF metrics exercise, the Concordat is changing the narrative around KE and bringing it to the fore in university strategy. We welcome this. Our view is that the Concordat will be another tool, alongside the KE metrics and narrative pieces such as the NCUB's annual 'State of the Relationship' report, to demonstrate that the UK is world leading and highly effective in knowledge exchange. Alongside the partnerships and outcomes that are generated by a wide range of KE

activities, our policy and advocacy work has long called for better recognition of Knowledge Exchange staff and activities in UK universities. The Concordat responds to that call.

### **Supporting communities of practice**

The eight principles in the Concordat are designed to ensure that universities provide a professional framework for their knowledge exchange mission. This includes providing proper training, sharing best practice, and giving recognition and reward and accreditation of skills to KE and academic staff. UK universities that are already members of PraxisAuril and other national organisations such as ARMA, NCCPE and EEUK – already benefit from the events, training and resources provided and the strong and supportive practice-based professional communities that we have developed. For example, PraxisAuril provided 2,500 training days in 2017-18 and ran three conferences. The Concordat will be a spur to more collaboration between these organisations, recognising the complementary skills we can develop with members and stakeholders.

PraxisAuril and ARMA are forums for good practice at the operational and strategic level. By joining, our members and their institutions have already made a commitment to continuous improvement in Knowledge Exchange. This commitment is demonstrated through investment in staff development, volunteering as trainers and Board members, facilitating stakeholder engagement, and contributing to community discussions which help to highlight and resolve KE and business ‘pinch points’ as well as identifying opportunities for collaboration and cross-partner working. Universities already learn from existing best practice and collaborate effectively, and this should help them provide examples of enablers for each Concordat principle.

### **Creating an institutional KE culture**

The Concordat’s principles require a holistic approach to KE, working across institutional services and boundaries. Different supply and demand side audiences need to understand how an institution approaches impact and collaboration in a broad sense, whether there is cross-institutional support to manage and resource it, and whether partner needs are being met. This collective responsibility – on individual, employer and funder – is well articulated in UUK’s Research Integrity concordat, for example.

We hope that the Concordat will give our members more influence within their organisations to ask for the support they need. Having clear knowledge exchange policies (Principle 2) is important but universities also need to consider policy implementation and resourcing if they are to be effective. The need for a holistic approach extends to between parts of the university. For example, in

professional services (TTO, Research Office, HR, Finance for contracting and grant management) we are already seeing convergence between more traditional 'research office' and 'tech transfer' staff where a joined up approach critical for strategic institutional bids such as Strength in Places and the Global Challenges Research Fund. It extends also to academic departments (tackling KE promotional criteria and creating broad impact 'literacy'), teaching and student services (the contribution of KE to skills and employment). This may mean changing administrative and academic cultures, since KE projects can be non-standard and may require new approaches but should not add to burden.

### **A Concordat for universities *and their partners***

Knowledge Exchange is a people business but it is not just about people working in universities. The Concordat feels rather one sided because it puts the onus for improvement squarely on universities. The role of contracting and collaborative partners needs to be understood and the reciprocal needs of both parties recognised. Both the Concordat and the KEF metrics exercise need to have more contributions from research users (businesses, third sector organisations, policy makers) so that universities are confident that the strategy, policies and resources that they put in place are meeting user needs. Without this user voice, resources may be misaligned and opportunities will be lost.

We sometimes struggle to hear the user voice in a constructive way. We agree that we need to test our own practice, hear about needs and expectations on the demand side, and explain the particular context of university-based KE. But this should be done in dialogue with our collaborators not just 'shouting over the wall'.

We recognise that the proposed Independent Panel could help to bring the voice of the user more clearly into KE discussions. This has been facilitated in the past through close engagement with the CBI (2014's '*Best of Both Worlds*' report) but extends to industry engagement with the tools for KE such as the Lambert toolkit and PraxisAuril's initiative around investor templates. Whilst we welcome many industry representatives to our events, we need more and of more diverse types to join the conversation. We would like to hear more about the make-up of the independent panel and its role in assessing 'compliance' with the Concordat.

### **Recognising what 'good' looks like**

The user voice will also help us to understand good practice in particular contexts - this may vary between university types (perhaps KEF cluster groups) in particular environments. We may see an up-tick in KE income, through HE-BCI metrics, but of more significance will be securing a wider pool

of external research users, developing broad and deep collaborative relationships for sustained engagement that will drive increased domestic R&D investment.

We acknowledge that in return for greater investment of public funding and through the drive to 2.4%, the Government needs to have confidence in activities designed to produce economic and societal impacts. The Concordat provides a high-level framework for these activities, but current measures of success (often income) are in the KEF metrics and so there must be understanding of how one relates to another both for institutions and for policymakers.

The existing tradition of peer-review within the PraxisAuril and ARMA communities will be important when it comes to self-assessment against Concordat undertakings (Principle 8). Access to professional qualifications for KE and research management (through PraxisAuril and ARMA respectively) are a signifier of quality for individuals that institutions should recognise in career pathways. In particular, PraxisAuril has been encouraging the adoption of RTTP as an international standard of quality amongst KE professionals. There are now 18 international associations of KE from around the world who are part of this framework including the US, China, Canada, South Africa, Australasia and the whole of Europe. We need to ensure that such training and qualifications are accessible across the sector and accommodate different disciplinary and/or sector needs. Additional tools such as maturity models and 360 degree appraisal systems - gathering feedback from both supply and demand side partners - could also be used at institutional and individual levels. Evaluation of practice and the role of training is an area we would like to pursue under the Concordat's development.

### **The role of the Independent Panel**

The role of the Independent Panel is unclear in the consultation document and we would like to see more details on its proposed membership and constitution. What kind of weight will this group carry with KE policymakers and will their voice be prioritised over, for example, sector groups based in KE practice? Will its members understand the opportunities and challenges of KE and be well-versed in the context of the Higher Education sector more generally (picking up on Principle 4)? Will they understand the domestic and international context of KE activities and connectivity? Will they support the UK's prowess in this area and help to provide a voice for such?

Above all, will the panel be supportive of the existing culture of sharing best practice, peer review, and collective problem solving that PraxisAuril and ARMA members have demonstrated for many years? Will they participate in this kind of dialogue with and on behalf of our members?

**A springboard to the future**

In the future we can expect to be asked to account ever more closely for the money that we spend in the pursuit of knowledge and discovery by demonstrating its value to society. Whilst we accept this responsibility, we are concerned about the time commitment from institutions in preparing action plans at a time when they are developing their REF submissions. This relates to the point on role convergence made above.

Knowledge Exchange is a key part of building a 21st century knowledge economy and achieving the 2.4% R&D target. Our members are knowledge economy professionals and UK universities take their role in this very seriously. We therefore welcome the Concordat as a useful tool to demonstrate the high standards that are already being achieved. By signing up to the Concordat universities will be signalling that they understand their current practice and its outputs, but also how they can do even better to deliver the competencies and collaborative cultures needed to meet tomorrow's challenges.

**End**

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