

Aspect

Beyond the Academy: Improving Creative Industries Research Engagement

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Recent research (Rouverol, 2021; Stockley-Patel, 2021) drawing on interviews with social sciences researchers and Creative Industries professionals as part of the [Aspect Deep Dive Project 2021](#) evidences various ways in which sector-engagement is valuable for universities, academics, and industry¹. Evidence suggests that models and structures for effective research engagement beyond the academy are inconsistent, often underutilised, and sometimes lacking. These key findings outline areas of best practice for business engagement for individuals at HEIs interested in brokering, facilitating, or doing research that's engaged with the Creative Industries.

Finding:

Forming new research partnerships with the Creative Industries often involves the pre-existing personal and/or professional networks of social sciences researchers.

Best-Practice:

Trust is often important for engagement, and reaching out to the industry connections academics already have accelerates the process of establishing research partnerships. Recognising the breadth of personal and professional industry connections across teams, schools, or departments can be useful for scoping potential engagement opportunities.

Finding:

Building relationships with industry often takes place during sector events outside of academic workplaces and outside of regular working hours. This is particularly challenging for academics who have precarious contracts, heavier teaching loads, or who might be or feel excluded from such events.

Best-Practice:

With some academics more able to build and maintain industry partnerships than others, be cognisant of inequalities which affect engagement capacity. If you work with academics at any level, ensure that the time it takes to successfully broker and sustain sector relationships is recognised, allocated and valued.

Finding:

Relationships between researchers and Creative Industries organisations are crucial even where university-level business engagement resources or infrastructure exist. Intermediation may have a more prominent role in larger and more sustained partnerships.

Best-Practice:

The university-level support that is available for engagement is particularly useful for larger multifaceted research projects. For smaller research projects, personal connections between academics and industry remain crucial for establishing the trust and rapport that's often essential for effective research engagement. The amount of support required should be responsive to the needs of stakeholders, which may change over time.

Finding:

University business engagement teams may not be the first port of call for HEI researchers seeking to develop partnerships and thus are often underutilised. Academics participating in partnerships often held little knowledge of what BE&KE teams can help them to accomplish.

Best-Practice:

BE&KE teams need to better educate academics as to how BE&KE officers might assist them. Academics also need a greater awareness of funding options (e.g. Impact Accelerator Accounts) available to support partnerships. It may be useful to direct them to appropriate teams on campus that can assist in developing funding bids, etc.

1: Academic data from interviews with 26 academics from 7 universities across the Yorkshire and Humber and Greater Manchester regions. Industry data from 20 interviews across the breadth of the Creative Industries. A full account of the data and methodology can be found under the Creative Industries 'Deep Dive' section of the Aspect website: <https://aspect.ac.uk/about/aspect-funded-projects/business-engagement-sector-deep-dives/>

Finding:

Commercialisation of research can seem bewildering to many researchers. Academics have found university commercialisation units to be helpful as they set about developing their research into applications for the wider world. It is sometimes wrongly assumed that only high tech-bio tech research represents an entrepreneurship opportunity.

Best-Practice:

Encourage academics to explore commercialisation units to consider commercial applications for their research. Make academics aware that innovation labs can feature opportunities to pitch proposals to secure seed funding/and or capacity building for initial planning and development. The misconception regarding what constitutes a potential entrepreneurship opportunity should be addressed.

Finding:

Creative industry professionals find academic communication styles challenging, both for themselves and for their audiences and stakeholders. These issues were sometimes alleviated by greater sector involvement in the production of project outputs.

Best-Practice:

Theoretical academic language often impedes engagement and obfuscates value. Where possible, encourage CCI partner involvement in the production of industry facing outputs. At the project outset, consider the value of workshops, blogs, and other types of dissemination activity that may be more appropriate in addition to more traditional publications.

Finding:

CCIs don't always understand the various research streams across the University and what sorts of engagement the HEI does with businesses. A better understanding of this would enable CCIs to determine where they can add value, and where and what the relationship should be.

Best Practice:

Make clear to your partners how the University operates: what are the research priorities? Where does the partnership align with the university's mission? Alignment might help build greater 'buy in' for your project/ partnership and facilitate access to funding.

About Aspect

Aspect (A Social sciences Platform for Entrepreneurship, Commercialisation and Transformation) is a network for organisations looking to make the most of commercial and business opportunities from social sciences research.

Supported by Research England's Connecting Capability Fund, Aspect members sit at the epicentre of discovery, imagination and progress in the social sciences. We draw together pioneering academics with innovative industry leaders to tackle the most complex societal challenges of our time.

Find out more at www.aspect.ac.uk

Aspect

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