

Fostering Regional Collaborative Research Projects
in the Social Sciences:
Challenges and Incentives for Funders and Universities



University of
BRISTOL

1 Executive Summary

The University of Bristol (UoB) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) undertook a joint project in academic year 2013/14 to build understanding of the challenges and incentives for regional collaboration between Higher Education Institutions. The project was undertaken in a context of a proliferation of such collaborations, or Alliances, focusing on three Alliances with explicit social science relevance (N8, GW4 and Eastern ARC). The project aimed to:

- Gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and benefits of collaborative working within Alliances.
- Make a contribution towards the delivery of the ESRC's aims to optimise efficiency and maximise mutual strengths when working with the HEI sector.
- Provide recommendations on supporting collaborative working for the ESRC, UoB and its GW4 partners.
- Generate shared learning and broader benefits to other HEIs and (RCUK) funders.

The project began with a short scoping study before moving to an on-line survey, followed up by 20 in-depth interviews. Finally the evidence collected was tested with research managers and administrators at the ARMA Conference in June 2014.

Many respondents felt there is huge value in connecting with others through collaboration if it brings access to high-quality expertise, enables new synergies and/or provides opportunities to work with people who have additional, complementary skills. Based on the findings of this work, the following recommendations are suggested:

For HEIs and Alliances:

- Sensitivity to the politics of collaboration is vital. While strategic backing is seen as important, particular care should be taken when implementing top-down, directed initiatives. Commitment at all levels of the partnership, leadership from the top, and diplomacy from the outset are crucial.
- Building trust/workable collaborations takes time, and should not be rushed.
- Collaborations must be resourced appropriately, eg:
 - providing dedicated staff (facilitators, project/programme managers);
 - seedcorn funds;
 - tools/systems to enable more effective, efficient collaborative working, eg, collaborative online platforms, social media and virtual conferencing;
 - Investing in training for academics and professional services staff within and across HEIs matters, eg,

shadowing or mentoring, between HEIs and funders;

- HEIs need to include sufficient resource for post-award administrative support, especially for larger, collaborative, multi-site bids.
- Working with professional services staff to develop streamlined and compatible processes for agreeing institutional commitments, MOUs and clear terms of engagement is important. Professional services colleagues can also help to instigate and/or facilitate effective partnerships within and beyond networks.
- It is important to ensure that HEI HR policies do not present barriers to collaboration:
 - 35% of respondents (n=81) felt that performance data requirements might affect the likelihood of regional research collaboration (35% of academics and 32% of Professional Services staff);
 - 37% of respondents felt that career development policies (n=81) might affect the likelihood of regional research collaboration (39% of academics and 32% of Professional Services staff).
- Consideration around joint studentships and training initiatives and career development opportunities can help build partnership.
- Regional/proximate collaborations need to be presented with care, to pre-empt any perceptions that these could be parochial.
- There is potential for shared learning with other Alliances.

For funders wishing to encourage greater proximate collaboration:

- Funders could do more to make visible the contribution of partner HEIs, for example by allowing for the inclusion of Joint Co-PIs, though reactions to this suggestion were polarised within our study. Considering different approaches to external reporting of statistics around collaborative proposals may better support regional collaborations.
- Seed-corn funds to enable networking and relationship building between collaborators is an important step for building the trust and relationships needed to make collaborations successful.
- Time to develop high-quality bids is essential given the added administrative complexities for larger, collaborative, multi-site bids.
- Where metrics are to be used as a basis for funding decisions, failure to provide recognition to partner institutions within metrics may have the unanticipated consequence of limiting future collaborative behaviour.

2 Project Context

This project was co-led by Faye Auty, Senior Impact Manager at the ESRC and Dr Jude Hill, Research Development Manager for Social Sciences & Law at the University of Bristol, from October 2013-June 2014. Rebecca Fairbairn, Head of Knowledge Exchange at the ESRC, also contributed to the project during the ARMA consultation and reporting stages. Additional project support was provided by Martyn Quigley and Lelia Buretia (ESRC), and Emily Thomas (University of Bristol). We would like to acknowledge and thank all of the academics and professional services staff who contributed their time as respondents.

The ESRC and UoB undertook this project with the intention of:

- Gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges and benefits of collaborative working within Alliances.
- Making a contribution towards the delivery of the ESRC's aims to optimise efficiency and maximise mutual strengths when working with the HEI sector.

- Providing recommendations on supporting collaborative working for the ESRC, UoB and its GW4 partners.
- Generating shared learning and broader benefits to other HEIs and (RCUK) funders.

2.1 Growth of HEI Alliances

Alliances involving proximately or regionally located HEI partners have begun to proliferate over the past few years; some examples are provided in the table below. These alliances are diverse in terms of scale, motivations for establishment and funding models (eg, N8 was initially funded through RDA monies, though most other alliances have been supported by core HEI investment). Some alliances are primarily linked to equipment sharing and a focus on STEM, eg, Midland 5 and SES-5, whilst others have broader emphases. As the focus of this project was on social sciences research (development) and funding, we specifically chose to explore the views of staff affiliated to three alliances which have all encompassed support of social sciences research within their remit.

Alliance	Established	HEIs involved	Website (where available)
GW4*	January 2013	Bath, Bristol, Cardiff, Exeter	gw4.ac.uk
N8*	2007	Durham, Lancaster, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield, York	www.n8research.org.uk
Eastern ARC*	September 2013	Essex, Kent, UEA	www.kent.ac.uk/about/partnerships/eastern-arc.html
Midland 5	August 2012	Aston, Birmingham, Leicester, Loughborough, Nottingham, Warwick	www.m5universities.ac.uk
St David's Day Group	2009	Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff, South Wales, Swansea	www.stdavidsdaygroup.ac.uk
Scottish Research Partnership	Unclear	Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Dundee	www.researchscotland.ac.uk
SETSquared	2003	Bath, Bristol, Exeter, Southampton and Surrey	www.setsquared.co.uk
SES-5	May 2013	Cambridge, Oxford, Imperial, Southampton, UCL	www.ses.ac.uk
White Rose	1997	Leeds, Sheffield, York	www.whiterose.ac.uk

* Denotes an Alliance included in this project.

Examples of N8's social science projects to date are listed on their website, eg, www.n8research.org.uk/research-themes/demographic-change/ or www.n8research.org.uk/research-themes/policing-research/

Eastern Arc is currently pushing three themes, including Quantitative Social Science.

The GW4 building communities programme provides support (through a competitive funding scheme) for academic endeavour from any discipline(s) with the purpose of addressing a major research or societal challenge.

Summary of respondent profiles for the online survey and in-depth interviews

	Online Survey Stage (n=81)	In-depth interviews (n=20)
Alliance affiliation	N8 (46%) GW4 (36%) Eastern ARC (18%)	N8 (50%) GW4 (30%) Eastern ARC (20%)
Role	Academic (76%) Professional Services (24%)	Academic (60%) Professional Services (40%)
Gender	Male (50%) Female (50%)	Male (50%) Female (50%)
Senior/Leadership post (ie, involved in making decisions for Dept/School/ Division/HEI)	Yes (58%) No (42%)	Yes (60%) No (40%)
Experience of working with 'regional' partners?	Yes (68%) No (32%)	Yes (100%)
Experience of preparing bids with 'regional' partners?	Yes (58%) No (42%)	Yes (95%)

3 Study Design and Respondent profile

The project involved four key stages:

3.1 Stage one: Scoping, November 2013

This included 10 interviews with personnel at the University of Bristol and the ESRC, which helped to refine the final shape of the study and questions for the online survey.

3.2 Stage two: Online Survey, January-March 2014

A short online survey hosted by Bristol Online Surveys (see Appendix 1) was run in early 2014, preceded by a pilot involving GW4 respondents. A purposive sampling methodology was employed, with the assistance of HEI research office staff who identified suitable contacts for their respective institutions. This approach ensured that respondents would have sufficient knowledge and experience of Alliances and collaborative initiatives to comment on survey questions with some confidence.

In total 183 sample contacts were used across the three Alliances, and we achieved a final response rate of 43% (n=81). Further details of the respondent profile are provided in the table above.

Academic respondents were drawn from a broad cross-section of social science discipline perspectives and staff had been in their current posts for a varying length of time; when answering questions, it was evident that

some respondents chose to bring in perspectives from past jobs too.

3.3 Stage three: In-depth interviews, April-May 2014

Twenty in-depth interviews were conducted with a sample of respondents who had also completed the online questionnaire; respondents who had indicated previous experience of working with regional partners were chosen.

3.4 Stage four: Arma conference/consultation, June 2014

Preliminary findings from the study were presented by Jude Hill and Rebecca Fairbairn at the ARMA conference on 11 June 2014. The audience included 19 professional services staff employed by HEIs based in London (6), the rest of the South/South East (3), North (7), Midlands (1), Wales (1) and Northern Ireland (1). Most worked with social science academics as part of their jobs. A further participant worked for a University advocacy body.

Views on the findings were sought from the group, which proved useful as many of the audience members were working for HEIs without linkages to formal alliances such as GW4, N8 and Eastern ARC. We explicitly flag the views of the 'ARMA' group, as appropriate, throughout the report.

4 Key findings

4.1 Motivations for working with regional partners on collaborative projects

Answers to the above question clustered around three key themes:

(1) Connecting with other academics to add value/gain greater critical mass

Many respondents felt there is huge value in connecting with others through collaboration, if it brings access to high-quality expertise, enables new synergies and/or provides opportunities to work with people who have additional, complementary skills. This can provide groups with an increased potential to innovate and produce more competitive bids through broader, inter/multi-disciplinary groupings. Access to expertise beyond the social sciences can also be opened up through collaboration with others, which can be particularly useful where those academic disciplines do not exist within both institutions. A number of people mentioned how collaborations opened up the possibility to putting together more exciting intellectual propositions as a more extensive collective.

Such responses mirror the underlying ambitions of the three Alliances that are at the heart of this study, for instance linking to N8's mantra 'the Power of 8', providing institutions and academics with greater opportunities to compete with others at a time when there is increasing interest in moving beyond traditional

disciplinary boundaries, challenge-led research necessitating broad partnerships and research funding is scarce, and funders are focussed on larger, longer approaches to funding, and a more relational approach. Whilst some Alliances stipulate that a certain number of partners are needed for an initiative to be affiliated with the Brand, the involvement of other collaborators tends to be encouraged if additional value is added. These are not exclusive clubs, and in fact gaining access to wider academic core groupings was cited by several respondents as a key motivator for collaborating with proximate partners.

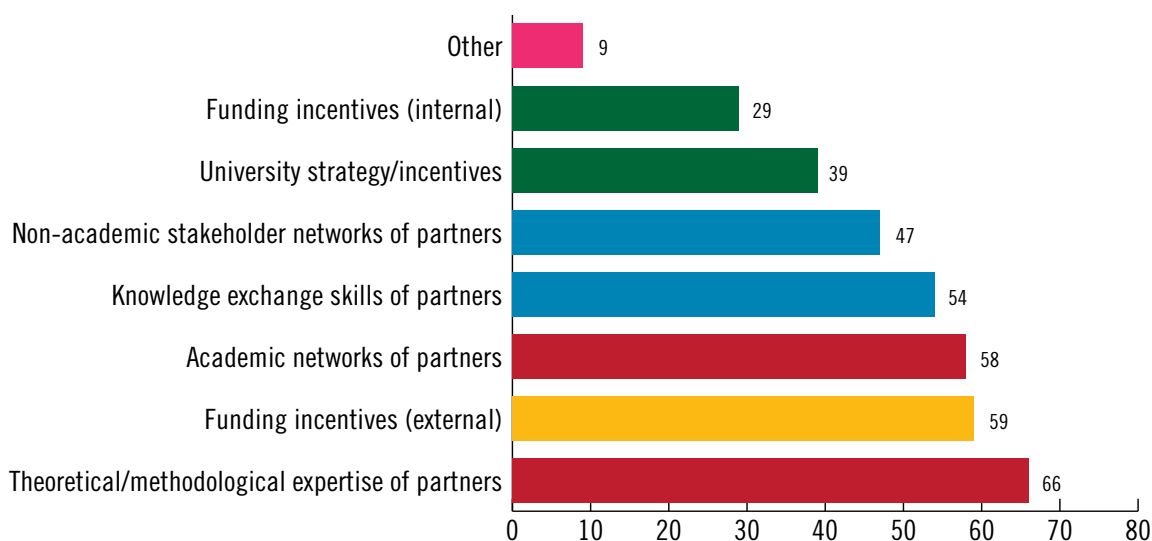
(2) Gaining access to impact/knowledge exchange networks and expertise

Knowledge exchange and impact agendas are also key reasons for partnering with others. Through affiliations with proximate academic partners, linkages to schools, business, industry, local government, NHS Trusts etc can be greatly enhanced. About half of our respondents cited partners' knowledge exchange skills and gaining access to partners' non-academic stakeholder networks as a motivation for collaboration.

(3) Incentives and strategy

Incentives, especially external incentives, loomed large as a motivator for collaboration, which comes as no surprise. However, a number of respondents also recognised that internal incentives could also drive behaviour, as could University strategy.

Figure 1: What are the motivations for working collaboratively with regional partners (Question 14)



Red – connecting with other academics to add value/gain greater critical mass

Blue – knowledge exchange capacity

Yellow – external funding incentives

Green – internal incentives and strategy

4.2 Enablers/What works?

We were also interested to explore what makes collaborations work, and what might mark out successful collaborations. Whatever the focus of the collaboration, a compelling intellectual agenda is crucial.

“You need a clear purpose and can then organise the collaboration to fit that, potentially at the regional scale. Collaboration for collaboration’s sake will not work, but can bring economies of scale”

(1) A regional focus or imperative

Projects with a specifically regional focus or imperative can help to consolidate constructive collaborations; examples here might include projects focused on specific economic factors pertinent to a defined geographical area, or research focused on sustainability where an area’s physical geography is such that there is a regional imperative for HEIs to work together.

Engagement with beneficiary groups within the region may also encourage people to work together; several examples were given where links to local user or stakeholder groups across the region enabled academic researchers to address new questions and undertake exciting research with greater academic and impact potential than would otherwise be the case. It is apparent that such networks are often useful to the non-academic collaborators involved, especially where partners are interested in open innovation and their own sector’s research structures have been fragmented or weakened.

“Generally with calls, you have a period of time where there are political discussions, and the people involved have to be respectful; it needs time; there’s often nervousness about who leads. Things need to be handled sensitively.”

(2) Relationships and trust

The importance of trust, whether between academics and/or professional services staff, is central to the nurturing and maintenance of successful collaborations. When we asked ‘what might make collaborations successful?’, 81% said pre-existing networks. Trust can often take time to develop. Several respondents noted that the success of their collaborative initiative had been based on existing, fairly long standing connection which may well have pre-existed a formal alliance.

- Doctoral Training Centres and Partnerships (DTC/ Ps), have played a role in building and often consolidating research links within Alliances, and collaborations more explicitly focused on research staff (rather than doctoral students) can both enhance and add resource to DTCs.

- Examples were given where professional services staff, with long-standing links, had played a crucial role in facilitating the development of new collaborative projects across institutions.
- Strong leadership was also cited as an essential enabler by many. A successful leader was epitomised as a good communicator with a clear and compelling vision, a respected academic, someone who can bring people with them and choose the right team and a person who is able to navigate the various political sensitivities within collaborative ventures linked to alliance initiatives.
- (Relatively) close geographical proximity was noted as being useful too. It is clear that face to face interactions remain invaluable, particularly when partners are trying to resolve knotty questions in a hurry. Only a certain amount can be achieved through phone, Skype or email, and being able to get together at some speed, and minimal expense is very helpful.
- Top-down versus bottom-up. It is apparent that collaborations linked to Alliances are more likely to be stage managed than would normally be the case. Whilst forced marriages were discussed in negative terms by a number of people, some respondents mentioned successful collaborations which had arisen as a result of top-down strategies. However, for these to remain sustainable, due attention needed to be paid to the importance of strong leadership and trust.

(3) Resources

Respondents mentioned a variety of resources which had or could help to enable successful collaborations.

A. Strategic backing

58% said University strategy/support might make collaborations successful (n=81). Several respondents noted the value that strategic backing from an Alliance can bring. For instance, Alliance-associated branding can help to re-inforce the leadership and coherence of collaborative groups, giving teams a greater purpose, whether they are newly formed or based on pre-existing connections.

In theory, being part of an Alliance might make the task of securing institutional commitments for a large grant easier, but this was not always the case in practice (see 4.3, A).

B. Small-scale, pump priming/seedcorn funds

Small-scale pump priming funds, eg, to run workshops, were noted as a real and/or potentially valuable resource for teams working collaboratively within

Alliances. Existing schemes along these lines include GW4's Building Communities initiative, which, in its two 2014 funding rounds provided 30 grants of up to £20K each for multi-disciplinary groups, and five grants of £20-75K. Several teams are being led by social scientists.⁴

C. Establishing/facilitating research forums

The facilitation of research forums by Alliance staff was also valued by a number of respondents, for instance N8 workshops focused on work with the police.⁵

D. Employment of dedicated staff, eg, facilitators

Some respondents also mentioned that the work of professional services staff, eg, as facilitators dedicated to supporting activities across an Alliance, had reaped benefits. Since our survey was undertaken, Eastern ARC have begun to recruit nine Eastern ARC fellows, initially, focused on three areas of strength across the universities: Digital Humanities, Quantitative Social Sciences, and Synthetic Biology. Across GW4, there are four Programme Managers, one based in each institution, each supporting a different collaborative workstream, ie, Building communities, Shared infrastructure, Building capacity and developing people, and Connectivity and communications. The N8 group is also supported by dedicated project management staff.⁶

E. Support systems

Several respondents suggested that shared approaches to support systems could help mitigate against administrative complexities and obstacles, as could adequately resourced shadowing and mentoring opportunities across HEIs, helping professional services staff to better understand collaborators' systems and cultures. Similarly, facilitation training for professional services staff and research methodology training (for relevant academic themes) could help to facilitate more productive conversations between collaborators.

4.3 Barriers

"We started trying to put something together where there was no established working relationship across the group and the first attempts were too ambitious."

A. Practicalities and administrative complexities

Perhaps unsurprisingly, 74% of those people who had prepared a collaborative bid with regional partners

(n=47), reported that administrative complexity was a key challenge they had faced. Eighty per cent of the whole sample felt that potential administrative complexity might affect the likelihood of regional research collaboration.

Key barriers included:

- Gathering costs from multiple partners, especially with incompatible systems and processes.
- Problems with communication at different points, including gaining sign-off.
- Organising and co-ordinating institutional commitments across multiple HEIs.
- Post-award problems, eg, with Intellectual Property.

Fifty-seven per cent noted that timescales for bids posed a problem, particularly where teams were extensive and hadn't worked together in the past.

B. Relationships

"There was no sense of the roles that people might have and where there was complementary work going on, the whole thing was fraught, with toys being thrown out of the pram; it was defensive and counterproductive. There was no clarity about the rules and how that would work and decisions about leadership were not transparent at all; it was all probably decided in the corridors of power. You need to have an agreed end where the rules of the game are clear."

As noted above, relationship factors are key in enabling a productive collaboration, so it is unsurprising that they also featured as a barrier to success.

Collaborations that had been engineered without sufficient sensitivity or attention to the importance of trust, strong, pragmatic leadership and vision were particularly likely to fail, and thus topdown initiatives need to be handled with due care and attention.

C. Research cultures

"It can be a hard task to get that culture change to work, when people tend to think in terms of a Dept, possibly a Faculty, then an Institution, then the wider region – it's not easy, and then they've got their day jobs to do. Some individuals are capable of seeing that research partnerships are best operated at different levels and scales and can flip between disciplines and institutions but the landscape is quite confusing for many people."

Research cultures can vary significantly between institutions involved in Alliances and the following

⁴ gw4.ac.uk/our-communities/; gw4.ac.uk/building-communities/

⁵ www.n8research.org.uk/research-themes/policing-research/

⁶ www.n8research.org.uk/about-us/people/n8-team/

variances were cited as having the potential to become additional obstacles:

- Resourcing (eg, variations in terms of access to IAA funding was mentioned as a potential barrier).
- Being more (or less) research-intensive or teaching-focused.
- The propensity to collaborate.
- Being more risk-averse or perhaps less ambitious/competitive.

In addition, many individuals find collaborating with partners across different scales difficult to manage. The above can all have an impact on collaborations, introducing additional obstacles for contributors to negotiate.

D. Competition and reputation

“We realised that we would lose more by always competing with each other than working together given the current funding landscape and the requirement for more partnership working, and longer, larger grants.”

“You’ve got to look that person in the eye at the next meeting. People will know there will be other opportunities in the pipeline that might be more suitable for them to lead.”

“Now is not the time for cottage industries.”

Competition is a vital element of UK academic excellence and effective funding mechanisms. Competition between HEIs can also cause tensions. This is exacerbated by current reporting regimes for most funders (including RCUK) where the lead institution is attributed the entire value of the grant within external reports. This can drive specific behaviours and sometimes leads to a lack of trust and resentment between potential partners.

However, not all respondents would agree with this. For instance, particularly within longer-standing initiatives, there is often more of a coalition approach, where partners trust that leadership and rewards will be shared across the group over the long term. Some felt that there was more to gain than to lose through collaboration with competing organisations.

E. Parochialism

Whilst working with partners within a regional or proximate Alliance was described positively by many, there was some concern that unless presented with due care, such initiatives could be viewed by others, including reviewers, as parochial, potentially pulling against aspirations for research to be classed as nationally/internationally excellent, as per the demands of the REF, etc.

5 Recommendations

Many of the respondents taking part in our survey seemed to be broadly positive towards collaborative working and 63% of our online survey thought there is likely to be more regional research collaboration in the future (with 33% saying they didn’t know, and only 4% disagreeing with this suggestion). It is evident that many improvements could be made to make things easier for those involved, whether academics, professional services staff or funders. The following are our recommendations which may help towards this goal.

5.1 For HEIs/Alliances

- Sensitivity to the politics of collaboration is vital. While strategic backing is seen as important, particular care should be taken when implementing top-down, directed initiatives. Commitment at all levels of the partnership, leadership from the top, and diplomacy from the outset are crucial.
- Building trust/workable collaborations takes time, and cannot be rushed.
- Collaborations must be resourced appropriately, eg:
 - providing dedicated staff (facilitators, project/programme managers);
 - seed-corn funds;
 - tools/systems to enable more effective, efficient collaborative working, eg, collaborative online platforms through social media;
 - Investing in training/development opportunities for academics and Professional Services staff; within and across HEIs matters, eg, shadowing or mentoring, between HEIs and funders;
 - HEIs need to include sufficient resource for administrative support, post-award, for larger, collaborative, multi-site bids;
- Working with professional services staff to develop streamlined and compatible processes for agreeing institutional commitments, MOUs and clear terms of engagement is important, and professional services colleagues can also help to instigate and/or facilitate effective partnerships within and beyond networks.
- It is important to ensure that HEI HR policies do not present barriers to collaboration:
 - 35% of people (n=81) felt that performance data requirements might affect the likelihood of regional research collaboration (35% of academics and 32% of Professional Services staff);
 - 7% of people felt that career development policies (n=81) might affect the likelihood of regional research collaboration (39% of academics and 32% of Professional Services staff).

- Consideration of joint studentships and training initiatives and career development opportunities that can help build partnerships.
- Regional/proximate collaborations need to be presented with care, to pre-empt any perceptions that these could be parochial.
- Explore the potential for shared learning with other Alliances.

5.2 For Funders who want to encourage greater proximate collaboration

- Funders could do more to make visible the contribution of partner HEIs, for example by allowing for the inclusion of Joint Co-PIs, though reactions to this suggestion were polarised within our study. Considering different approaches to external reporting of statistics around collaborative proposals may better support regional collaborations.
- Seedcorn funds to enable networking and relationship building between collaborators is an important step for building the trust and relationships needed to make collaborations successful.
- Adequate time to develop high-quality bids is essential given the added administrative complexities for larger, collaborative, multi-site bids.
- Funders may find they receive higher quality bids if they work more closely and openly with HEIs at call and bid development stages, though this is not specific to collaborations along these lines.
- Where metrics are to be used as a basis for funding decisions, failure to provide recognition to partner institutions within metrics may have the unanticipated consequence of limiting future collaborative behaviour. ■

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Appendix 1

University of Bristol and Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Project on Regional Research Collaboration

This survey is a key part of a joint ESRC and University of Bristol project to examine social sciences research development and funding in the context of greater regional cross-institutional clusters, alliances and collaboration. We are keen to hear from those in academic or professional services posts with experience of, or interest in cross-institutional regional research activity.

Responses will be kept anonymous

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Which University/Research Organisation are you employed by?

2. Is this University/Research Organisation currently part of a formal regional collaboration/consortium, e.g. N8, GW4, M5, Y/N/don't know
 - 2a. If Y, which?

3. Please choose the category that applies to you:
 - Academic
 - Professional Services/Research Administration

4. What is your job title

5. Which Academic Discipline(s) are you affiliated to?

6. What Dept or Academic School do you work in?

7. Are you Female/Male

8. Are you currently in a Senior/Leadership post, (i.e. a senior management team for your Division, and/or involved in making strategic decisions for your Dept/School/Division/the Institution?) Y/N.

9. Length of time in your post at this University (in years and months)

10. Length of time employed in an academic post (in years and months)

Section 1

11. Have you worked with regional academic partners on a collaborative research endeavour, funded or otherwise
Y/N (if no go to Q14)

If Y at Q11

- 11a. Thinking about the last time you were involved in a regional research endeavour, please describe this undertaking including its scope, size, partners, topics covered and discipline (s). If it required funding, who provided this?

12. In what ways was this research activity a positive/successful experience?

13. In what ways was this research activity a less positive/ unsuccessful experience?
ALL

14. What are the motivations for working collaboratively with regional partners? Tick all that apply
 - Drawing on the theoretical or methodological expertise of partners
 - Drawing on the knowledge exchange skills of partners
 - Drawing on the academic networks of collaborative partners
 - Drawing on the non-academic stakeholder networks of other partners
 - Funding incentives (external)
 - Funding incentives (internal)
 - University strategy/incentives to work with regional partners
 - Other- please provide details

15. Do you have experience of preparing collaborative research bids with regional partners (whether as a contributing academic or member of staff supporting its development?)
Y/N (if N please go to Q18)
If yes, thinking about the most recent bid please provide details including its scope, size (value), partners, topics covered and discipline (s) and funder

16. What, if any, were the challenges involved? (tick all that apply)
 - Administrative complexity
 - Barriers due to the challenges of working with competitor Universities
 - Impact of Performance data e.g. REF, Demand Management, RCUK metrics/reporting
 - HR policies
 - Timescales for bids
 - Conflict of Interests
 - Other (please specify)

17. Was the bid successful? Y/N

ALL

18. Regional collaborative research activities may involve working with competitor Research Organisations. What do you think are the (potential) challenges of working with competitor HEIS in this way?

19. What might make these collaborations successful? (tick all that apply)

- The collaboration was based on pre-existing networks
- Funding incentives
- Access to additional academic capacity
- Access to new non-academic networks
- Intellectual innovation through collaboration
- University strategy/support
- Other. Please specify

20. What are the (potential) benefits of sharing research resources regionally within collaborative social science projects with regard to:

- datasets, cohort studies
- equipment and systems
- people

21. What are the (potential) drawbacks of sharing research resources regionally within collaborative projects with regard to:

- datasets, cohort studies
- equipment and systems
- people

Section 2: Future of Regional Collaborative Working

22. Do you think that the following factors might affect the likelihood of regional research collaboration?

If yes, please provide details

- Potential administrative complexity
- Performance data requirements
- Career development/HR policies

23. In the future, do you think there is likely to be more regional research collaboration?

If yes, how can this best be supported by Universities?

If yes, how can this best be supported by funders?

24. What changes are needed to encourage further collaborative working between regional HEIs, with regard to:

- HEI structure
- HEI culture

Section 3: ESRC

25. How can ESRC assist and/or incentivise the fostering of productive (regional) connections to produce excellent science?

26. Are there any ESRC administrative or other funding barriers to regional collaborative working? If so, what are they?

27. What are the potential benefits and drawbacks of shared leadership (Co-PIs) on multi-site, collaborative ESRC projects

28. Would you be willing to take part in a follow-up interview as part of this study?



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