
*Opcit Research

**Evaluation of
UK in a Changing Europe**

March 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This evaluation was commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to understand the impacts of its investment in the UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE) Hub, assess how UKICE was perceived by key stakeholders, provide evidence of what worked and what did not, and explore the transferability of the model.

Mixed methods were used including interviews, workshops and a Most Significant Change exercise with key stakeholders (UKICE staff, academic contributors, journalists and policymakers); analysis of Twitter data; a Horizon Scanning exercise involving a literature review to identify key future risks and challenges; and reviews of programme documentation and UKICE research outputs.

Key findings

UKICE was valued by and made strong impacts on the work of its key stakeholders

There was broad consensus across respondent groups that UKICE provided an effective response to demand for what one academic described as ‘public facing impactful research outputs’. There were important impacts on journalists who felt their outputs were improved and their understanding of UK-EU relations more nuanced; on policymakers who found their work was supported through impartial, confidential and trustworthy advice, allowing them to think through policy challenges; and on academic contributors, who were provided with a highly visible platform for their work.

UKICE was seen by stakeholders as an impartial and trustworthy source of evidence and advice

Impartiality is a cornerstone of the UKICE approach and the perception of strict adherence to this value was a key reason for its popularity amongst key stakeholders, and particularly journalists, politicians and policymakers.

Key strengths of the UKICE model included developing a breadth of multi-disciplinary expertise, and coordinating the matching of experts to demands for expertise among media and policy stakeholders

UKICE was able to develop a strong, trusted platform because it attracted high quality researchers from a range of disciplines. Researchers were, in turn, attracted to UKICE because they viewed it as providing a platform for dissemination that could lead to immediate impact on debates and policy decisions.

A key component of the UKICE model was an effective multi-media engagement strategy and capacity within the UKICE team

The presence of a highly competent media engagement team was frequently emphasised by stakeholders as critical to the perceived success of UKICE. UKICE acted as a clearinghouse for journalist demands, while also ensuring that content was fit for purpose and accessible to journalists or politicians. The multi-media, multi-platform approach to engagement was widely perceived as a strength.

There was good synergy across different arms of UKICE's work

UKICE was perceived by stakeholders as successful partly because it worked across several strands, including conducting and coordinating research, public-facing events, media engagement and policy engagement. Changes in context – including in demand for evidence from the public, journalists and politicians – may present new challenges in balancing these different strands in future.

The post-Brexit context brings new opportunities and challenges for UKICE regarding the evolution of its purpose and operating model

A serious challenge for UKICE is that media interest in a high-profile issue has, to a large extent, sustained the UKICE model, but public and media interest in Brexit and related issues is declining. While UKICE assets (notably its media expertise and networks of journalists, academics and politicians) remain, it is likely to become more challenging to find and meet demand for its outputs.

The UKICE model offers insights for other projects that seek to improve the use of academic insights in policy debates

UKICE provides a valuable mechanism for strengthening links between researchers, journalists and policymakers. This evaluation highlights several useful lessons offered by the UKICE model for similar endeavours in other priority research/policy areas (climate change, for example), including:

- creating a recognised, quality brand through consistently applying two key principles across outputs: accessibility and impartiality
- engaging a dedicated media team on high profile issues
- bringing together a broad, high quality network of academics in purposive coordination with the needs of politicians and journalists
- establishing strong links with media and policy circles through sustained, personal outreach by dedicated staff

More attention should be paid to how UKICE addresses less visible areas of analysis and user groups

An observation made by some academic respondents who were involved in UKICE's work, and acknowledged by UKICE management respondents, is that UKICE has had relatively less focus on areas that are typically at the margins of mainstream policy debate, such as race and gender. Given its successes at reaching policy and media circles, UKICE has an opportunity to deploy gender, race, disability, age, sexuality and other cross-sectional analysis into the policy debate, contributing to the mainstreaming of these issues. In addition, there is scope to widen engagement with groups that were viewed by respondents as 'harder to reach'.

UKICE's leadership team is central to its success, but this implies significant challenges in sustaining and replicating the UKICE 'model'

UKICE's successes have been influenced considerably by the capabilities, energy and networks of its senior leadership. UKICE's work is complex and requires high skill levels and strong experience. Relatedly, maintaining strong productivity levels depended on inputs of significant senior management time. Whilst this finding attests to the team's strengths, there is a risk to the future sustainability of the model, should senior team members not continue in their role for any reason. These comments serve to flag an ongoing challenge for UKICE as it seeks to maintain focus on the complex debates relating to Brexit and beyond.

Conclusions

UKICE was largely successful in meeting its stated aims and objectives of providing neutral (authoritative, non-partisan and impartial) insight for users and the public in the pre- and post-EU referendum periods, particularly for journalists and policymakers. There is more limited evidence of success in terms of its objective of engaging with the public and what it terms 'harder to reach' groups.

The UKICE Hub developed a unique and largely successful model for academic engagement with public policy making, especially in its engagement with the media and policymakers. The UKICE model therefore offers useful lessons for projects that seek to bolster the use of academic insight in the policy making process in other important areas of policy and research.

There are significant challenges to the sustainability of UKICE post-Brexit. Notably, given the decline in public focus on Brexit, it was indicated that there may be less demand for UKICE's outputs, particularly from the media. This may partly reflect the timing and context of interviews conducted in mid-2021. However, several respondents who use UKICE's work indicate that there will continue to be a need for impartial analysis of the kind UKICE offers, particularly as the UK seeks to understand its on-going relationship with the EU and the rest of the world.

INTRODUCTION

This evaluation was commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to understand the impacts of the UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE) Hub. UKICE was commissioned to ‘provide a public forum that is informed by experts, to contribute, from a politically neutral standpoint, to ongoing public and political debates that are both hugely contentious and of national and international significance’, with particular reference to UK-EU relations and Britain’s exit from the European Union (Brexit).

Aims and scope of the evaluation

The evaluation provides an ex-post impact assessment examining if and how UKICE met its objectives, as well as explaining the processes for establishing, running and meeting its aims. The evaluation covered UKICE’s activities from 2014, when it was originally commissioned, through to the present day, after its re-commissioning in 2019.

The evaluation, therefore, has three main objectives, as set out in the research brief:

- 1) To provide evidence on what worked, and did not work, for the main UKICE Hub investment, and the role of ESRC in supporting it
- 2) To explore the extent to which the UKICE Hub investment had an impact in terms of its main aim of providing neutral (authoritative, non-partisan and impartial) insight for users and the public in the pre- and post-EU referendum periods
- 3) To explore the transferability of the model and provide evidence that will inform future planning

Structure of the report

In addition to this introduction, a section on our methodology and a section summarizing our results and presenting conclusions, findings from the evaluation are presented in thematic chapters. These themes emerged during data analysis and address the evaluation objectives. The findings are presented in chapters as follows:

Chapter 1: UKICE’s theory of change – what did UKICE intend to achieve and how?

Chapter 2: UKICE’s impacts – what were the impacts on key stakeholder groups?

Chapter 3: UKICE’s processes and challenges – how were impacts brought about and what were the challenges?

METHODOLOGY

Methods

The methods used for the evaluation were designed to respond to the complexity of the programme – complex in terms of its multiple objectives and mechanisms for achieving these. We used a grounded theory-based methodology which sought to understand what the main partners and stakeholders perceived as important outcomes of UKICE's work, and to track if and how these were achieved. In doing so, the following methods were used:

1) An Outcome Workshop. This was an online-based workshop with five senior level programme staff working with UKICE. The session was an open-ended discussion to establish the broad vision, aims and objectives for UKICE, as perceived by participants, to inform development of UKICE's theory of change. The workshop was also designed to establish which outcomes, outputs and objectives are relevant to different stakeholder groups, as defined by workshop participants. The workshop used Outcome Mapping to strengthen understanding of the historic, current and emergent objectives and challenges of UKICE, acknowledging that original theories of change can and should evolve to meet changing realities. The discussion lasted 90 minutes and took place under conditions of confidentiality. The transcript of the discussion was used to define UKICE's theory of change and important outcome indicators, which were then validated through the remaining fieldwork.

2) Interviews with partners and stakeholders to establish progress against outcomes. Interviews were conducted via video conferencing software with 33 respondents in five different categories. The respondent sample was influenced by the Outcome Workshop which determined who were important stakeholders and audiences of the programme. These were media professionals (n=6), politicians and policy actors (n=7), academic contributors to the Hub (n=10), and political commentators (n=2), as well as UKICE staff (n=8). The interviews were semi structured and confidential and designed to test and explore if and how any of the desired outcomes and objectives for UKICE had been achieved, as well as to pick up on weaknesses of the model. Interviews were conducted between July and October 2021.

3) Most Significant Change (MSC) exercise. Part simultaneous with the interviews, respondents were asked to comment on changes, if any, that were most significant for them as a result of their interaction with UKICE. MSC is a methodology for drawing out outcomes and results that are important for those most affected by a programme. Respondents were asked to react to six short questions: 1) What was the thing UKICE did or produced? 2) What was the change? 3) Who did the change happen to? 4) When did the change occur? 5) Why was this a significant change? 6) How specifically did UKICE facilitate or contribute to this change? A total of 12 respondents provided complete information in response, and partial responses were received from a further three. The information provides useful case studies of how UKICE outputs are used.

4) Textual and network analysis of social media outputs. We analysed UKICE's Twitter presence in a number of ways. Firstly, we tracked the distribution of 10 randomly-selected tweets made by UKICE, which covered a range of topics. We monitored the number of retweets and likes. We then conducted textual analysis of the twitter accounts of those who re-tweeted the original posting. This was done to explore the professional characteristics and opinions of those who engage with UKICE's tweets.

5) Horizon scanning of future challenges and threats to UKICE's model. A review of peer reviewed literature was conducted to explore the future threats and challenges to the UKICE model, using a horizon scanning methodology. This reviewed relevant foresight research on future challenges and opportunities relating to technological, social and cultural change, economics and politics. The purpose was to address the question: can UKICE continue to be fit for purpose in its current form and what, if any, challenges must it prepare for?

6) Review of UKICE outputs. We reviewed the content and methods of five research outputs produced by UKICE to establish the scientific basis for the content. To this end, we assessed the content for its approach to data collection and analysis as well as, where relevant, Popay and colleagues' (1998) criteria for evaluating qualitative data. The purpose of this exercise was to indicate to what extent research outputs published by UKICE have been able to maintain high scientific standards, and if not, how this was explained and framed. As most outputs were not primary research, however, Popay et al.'s criteria had limited application. We therefore conducted an additional analysis of seven outputs provided to us by the UKICE team, against criteria developed by our team on the basis of UKICE's goals: impartiality, breadth and depth of analysis, translation of evidence into advice, clarity of methodology and research standards.

7) Data analysis. All interview and workshop data were analysed using both inductive and deductive themes to address our research objectives and identify any findings that were outside of these. Interview and workshop transcripts were coded and data organised according to these themes. Analysis of twitter data was performed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Limitations

The main limitation of this evaluation is the size of the interview sample which, in relation to the potential sampling pool, is very small. The final number of interviews (33) was at the low end of our originally anticipated sample of 30-40. It is unknown how many people interact with content provided by UKICE so the size of the interview sample relative to the total number of stakeholders is unknown. Furthermore, the original sampling frame was provided from UKICE team's own contacts and, therefore, came with the risk that the sample would be overly supportive of UKICE. To mitigate this risk and to attempt to boost variety in the sample, the team recruited additional respondents aligned to key stakeholder groups, from without the UKICE network of contacts. To this end, Twitter users whose profiles we verified as accurate who had actively followed UKICE's Twitter handle and who were aligned to key stakeholder groups as defined in previous research steps were approached and asked to take part in the research via direct messages. Three such respondents were recruited in this way. These methods are common practice within digital ethnographic research and aligned to theoretical purposive sampling techniques. The robustness and relevance of these respondents' inputs were verified through selection questions, relating to how often and why they engage with UKICE content.

Generally, the reader should note that the intention was not to achieve a representative sample of respondents; rather it was to explore in depth the types of interactions, what the impacts of these were and how they may be improved. To this end, the range of respondents from the key respondent groups, the depth of conversations and the saturation of data achieved at an early stage give us confidence that the data are robust to carry the findings and recommendations of this study. A similar issue exists for the Twitter analysis. It is not possible to know how many people interact with UKICE on that platform, beyond measuring

the number of followers, re-tweets and likes. Our sample of re-tweets may represent only a small snapshot of the array of Twitter interactions concerning UKICE. However, our analysis was not intended to be representative but, rather, indicative of the range and type of interactions. Moreover, the sample of re-tweets and accounts that made them reached 130 and clear trends were detected amongst these. Thus, we are confident that the analysis provides useful insight.

In a change to the original evaluation plan, given the scarcity of examples of in-depth or sustained use of a particular UKICE product indicated by respondents, instead of in-depth case studies of the use of particular outputs (which we had originally planned to carry out), we conducted a Most Significant Change exercise that identified programme outcomes that were viewed by stakeholders as particularly significant, and an analysis of a selection of UKICE outputs against Popay et al.'s (1998) criteria for evaluating qualitative data and bespoke criteria reflecting UKICE's goals. In practice, the contribution of the Most Significant Change exercise was limited to providing useful descriptions of change as experienced by stakeholders.

CHAPTER 1: UKICE'S THEORY OF CHANGE

This section describes UKICE's theory of change on the basis of analysis of programme documentation and workshop discussions with UKICE team members. Programme documentation was provided by UKICE management and its funders, the ESRC, and a review undertaken to identify the initial aims and objectives, activities, intended outcomes and outcome measures, and intended audiences and stakeholders of the programme. Findings from this review were then validated through a workshop with UKICE team members. Below, we set out the key findings from this analysis, noting where objectives and activities have evolved throughout phase 1 (2014-2019) and phase 2 (2019-2022) of the programme. The chapter ends by setting out an up-to-date theory of change for UKICE, which provides a summary of the overarching vision, outcomes, outputs, mechanisms and inputs of the programme in its current form.

Aims and objectives

The original aims of UKICE, as set out in their 2014 proposal to ESRC, were:

- To promote high quality social scientific research into the nature of the relationship between the UK and the EU, with a particular emphasis on making the findings of this research easily available to non academic stakeholders
- To be an authoritative source of expertise recognised by all sides in the debate over the UK's relationship with the EU

To this end, the UKICE programme began its first phase (2014-2019) with the following specific objectives:

- To synthesise existing research and make it available in forms that can effectively inform ongoing public and political debates on UK-EU relations
- To identify gaps in our knowledge and address these via new research work
- To ensure effective dissemination of research findings to key non-academic stakeholders

By 2018, when the programme sought to be recommissioned, those overall aims and objectives remained. The UKICE recommissioning proposal made to ESRC in 2018, for funding covering the second phase of the programme (2019-2022), indicated that UKICE sought to continue working to achieve the aims and objectives outlined above while shifting focus to go beyond past achievements.

Specific aims for the second phase, as set out in the recommissioning proposal, are:

- To produce outputs easily accessible to policymakers, businesses, journalists, civil society organisations, educational institutions and the general public who are interested in the UK's relationship with the EU
- To host events at which social scientists participate alongside key non-academic stakeholders to ensure an effective exchange of information and knowledge
- To innovate, particularly with social media, in order to engage with harder to reach communities not generally exposed to or connected with the best social science research findings
- To facilitate the impact and engagement work undertaken by social scientists both in the UK and elsewhere, enabling them to communicate their research to key

stakeholder groups and the wider public, amplifying the work of the much wider social sciences community

Additional objectives for the second phase were:

- To continue tried and tested activities
- To broaden reach and deepen engagement
- To build on experience and reputation to leverage networks to widen impact

Workshop participants confirmed that while the fundamental goals of the UKICE programme have remained fairly stable, there has been an increasing focus upon more recently on engaging with policy actors and journalists in informing debate on UK-EU issues, whilst reaching a wider public audience through mainstream media appearances.

A central and consistent characteristic of the programme's intentions is that it should provide an:

'Authoritative, non-partisan and impartial reference point for those looking for information, insights and analysis about UK-EU relations that stands aside from the politics surrounding the debate' (recommissioning proposal, 2018).

This emphasis on UKICE's commitment to impartiality appears frequently throughout programme documentation and was discussed by workshop participants as a major value commitment informing the entire model of UKICE.

Activities

The UKICE proposals for initial funding and for recommissioning both indicate that the programme's aims and objectives were primarily addressed through the following core activities:

- Maintaining an active online presence (including the UKICE website, social media, podcasts, videos, and the publication of reports, e-newsletters, briefings, policy papers, commentaries, infographics and blogs)
- Making mainstream media appearances and contributions
- Delivering a programme of events (conferences, briefings, roundtables, panel discussions, public 'Town Hall' events, networking dinners) aimed at non-academic audiences
- Working closely with other ESRC Brexit-related investments, including the Senior Fellows, Brexit Priority Grant holders, and those funded under the Governance after Brexit programme

While these core activities were continued when the funding extension was agreed in 2019, the extension set out the following additional priorities:

- Retaining and expanding the core team to provide more capacity
- Expanding the portfolio of published outputs
- Increasing the number and extend the reach of their public- and policy-facing events
- Continuing an MPs survey
- Doing more to engage international audiences and officials

Intended outcomes and outcome measures

Specific intended outcomes and success criteria for Phase 2 of UKICE are set out in the recommissioning proposal, along with an indication of performance indicators or indicative targets based on achievements in Phase 1. These are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Intended outcomes and outcome measures

Outcome measures	Success criteria for phase II	Performance indicators or indicative targets based on phase I
Evidence of ongoing change in awareness, attitudes or understanding of the value of social scientific research	Ongoing positive qualitative feedback from policymakers, the media, business and the public	Maintain ratio of positive responses to UKICE's events, from 96% 'very interesting or interesting', 85% 'very informative or informative', 97% 'very accessible or accessible'; 90% very enjoyable or enjoyable'; 97% likely to attend another event
Evidence of contribution to changing policy or guidelines	Maintain or increase in number of UKICE outputs submitted and researchers summoned to Parliamentary Committees	Phase I (Director): x14 submissions of evidence to Committees in both the Lords and Commons. Overall: 123 evidence submissions or citations from 20 contributors
Evidence of engagement with UKICE social media	Increase number of subscribers, followers, profile or content views, impressions and other key social media metrics; Increase number of subscribers to and open rate of e-newsletter	Phase I: 14,000 followers on Twitter; 1,500 followers on Facebook; 116 YouTube videos (20,000+ hours of viewing, 50,000+ viewers); 5,194 podcast listens on Soundcloud; 10,721 subscribers to e-newsletter with an open rate of 24%
Evidence of external recognition of success	Ongoing positive qualitative feedback and formal recognition of the initiative and its leadership	Phase I: Prospect Magazine 'one to watch' prize (2016), International Affairs category (runner-up, 2017); Director: ESRC Impact Champion Award (2017); Political Science Association Political Studies Communicator Award (2016)

Intended audiences and stakeholders

UKICE was intended to improve knowledge and evidence on UK-EU relations, for use within the UK, the EU and member states and globally by any interested parties. The content 'Hub' – the UKICE website – which showcases research, briefings and other content on Brexit and related issues, is a public facing website. Nonetheless, the programme seeks primarily to engage some specific groups of intended end users, as detailed below.

Primary stakeholders:

- Politicians and civil servants – Westminster, and Devolved/Regional/Local government
- Journalists
- Civil society/business/trade unions

Secondary stakeholders:

- The public (reached indirectly through media & MPs, directly through social media)
- EU – Brussels, member states and embassies

Principal academic beneficiaries:

- The ESRC-funded Senior Fellows
- Brexit Priority Grant holders
- Those funded through the Governance after Brexit programme
- Recipients of awards made under the UKICE Commissioning Fund

UKICE's theory of change in summary

While UKICE does not have an internal theory of change, the re-commissioning proposal drawn up in 2018 outlines a 'pathway to impact' that provides a high-level indication of the logic underpinning the UKICE programme, and the mechanisms through which it sought to fulfil its purpose. The table below illustrates an up-to-date and more detailed Theory of Change for the UKICE programme, based on analysis of a workshop with UKICE senior staff and a review of programme documentation provided by UKICE and ESRC. It illustrates the goals of the programme and how it hopes to achieve these, by setting out the overarching vision, outcomes, outputs, mechanisms and inputs of the programme in its current form.

Table 2: UKICE Theory of Change

Vision	The public, public servants, journalists and politicians, are informed by balanced, trusted and trustworthy evidence and opinion on Brexit and related issues.			
Outcomes	Original, high quality social science that is multi-disciplinary in nature, informs public debate and policy on Brexit.	Data, information and analysis that is widely trusted and used by politicians, journalists and the general public, is created	Networks and connections between and amongst journalists, politicians and academic researchers are made to explore and explain Brexit and UK-EU relations	Social science is produced that is able to respond to media, social media and politicians' needs in timely manner
Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Original research papers and briefings - Multi-disciplinary research papers and briefings - Citations for academic work from UKICE researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Original research papers and briefings - Social media postings - Public discussion and briefing events - Media appearances and features - Citations in mainstream and social media of UKICE outputs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint papers and guest commissions - Ad hoc and planned press and politicians' briefings - Social media posts and engagement - A high profile platform for showcasing research and commentary on Brexit and UK-EU relations 	
Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying and hiring experts on diverse issues relating to Brexit and UK-EU relations - Funding and support provided 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A wide range of expert contributors coordinated through UKICE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High profile media appearances for UKICE staff and contributors - UKICE Director with visible public profile 	

<p>through UKICE for a range of research projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A multi disciplinary team working under one leadership and management structure - Rigorous review process for research and briefing outputs - Final sign off from senior staff on all outputs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rigorous review process of reports and briefings to ensure impartiality on Brexit and UK-EU relations - Responsive website to showcase content - Systematic use of social media - Events held in a variety of geographical locations - Accessible events designed for non-expert but informed audiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UKICE staff and contributors are media trained - Development and use of contacts within media and politics - Cultivation of trust and confidentiality between politicians and UKICE senior staff - Systematic use of social media - Flexible and responsive communications team with a strong understanding of the news cycle - Knowledgeable communications team to share research
Inputs	Funding, office accommodation, staff knowledge, skills, time and professional networks.	

CHAPTER 2: UKICE'S IMPACTS

A key line of questioning throughout the fieldwork was: what were the needs of intended audiences and were these needs met? Thus, impacts are framed in terms of the impacts on key stakeholder groups or audiences. Did interaction with UKICE influence their work, understanding or beliefs? What did audiences feel about UKICE's approach and values? Were there any positive or negative changes as a result of their interaction with UKICE?

At an overarching level, there was broad consensus across respondent groups that there exists in society a general need for high quality information on UK-EU relations, for '*public facing impactful research outputs*' (academic respondent). UKICE's work was perceived to address a previously latent or under-reached demand for research and evidence in this area: '*I think it was Brexit that woke us up to realizing how much we needed [UKICE]*' (policy actor). This overall need was addressed through working with key stakeholder groups to identify and respond to their needs in different ways. Specific needs were highlighted across respondents and respondent groups for different stakeholder groups as set out below.

Impact on the general public

Several respondents, particularly from the academic and UKICE staff sides, spoke about the informational needs of the general public, which included, in their view, the need for reliable evidence and analysis, characterised by open honest discussion. Such discussion, it was felt, was scant in current public debate. In this sense, UKICE was felt not only to meet a perceived need to improve the quality of public debate on Brexit but, also, a need for accuracy and honesty in public discussion more generally. For example,

'I have no problem with someone saying I don't like immigrants coming here, fine. But don't then say it will have no impact on the economy. Don't be dishonest about it. So what we're after is honesty in public debate and informed public debate. [...] I suppose one of our taglines if we thought about it could have been 'make up your own mind.' Because that's where we are. I think during the referendum, we said 'we are here to help you make an informed decision. I'm not here to tell you what that decision should be.' Yeah, you know, that that pretty much still holds.' (UKICE senior staff)

Similarly, several other respondents commented on the quality, or lack of it, in public debate – specifically about Brexit, but with implications for public policy discourses more generally – with references to rhetoric, honesty and quality:

'I was very attracted to the UKICE determination to try and offset some of the rhetoric on immigration, on the trade in goods and services...' (Journalist)

'I think the program did everything that it could and should have done to try and help improve the quality of the debate.' (Academic)

It was also reported by UKICE staff and academic contributor respondents that the general public would benefit from de-mystifying UK-EU issues and making these relevant to their lives:

'On the event side, of course, if you get the right speakers, the right level of analysis and present that in a public friendly manner, then you achieve a lot.' (Academic)

Impact on journalists and media professionals

Journalists or other media commentators who took part in the research were asked about their informational, professional or other needs as they relate to UKICE's work. A strong theme to emerge here was that journalists found beneficial the provision of clear explanations to help them unpick complex issues in their writing, including the ability to speak directly to an academic to ask questions. Several respondents spoke about the impact on their work. For example:

'[UKICE also had] many academics in the field of European affairs, who had thought about the issue [Brexit, UK-EU relations?] and how we use it. And I found that important to my writing to understand their arguments and to help you think through the issues.' (Journalist)

'[There have been] several contributions from different academics that sort of summarize the debate on Brexit, before the referendum, the debate on how to implement Brexit, after the referendum, [...] and I'd say those documents, some of which I still have lying around, have been very useful to me.' (Journalist)

'I've been able to ask questions and talk to some of the academics involved.' (Journalist)

Similarly, journalists who responded to the Most Significant Change exercise noted that the provision of clear explanation, which could be turned into media-friendly outputs, improved the quality of their reporting. For example:

'[The most significant change] was Improved understanding of the nuances of Brexit and various impacts of it on trade, and other relations with the EU and member states. This resulted in higher quality reporting as journalists in my organisation and others looked to UKICE as the go to experts on a range of subjects who could distill complex subjects into succinct soundbites.' (Journalist)

'I am particularly glad when I read something and a point is made that is not just giving me the data that I need, but it's drawing it together and making the analytical observation that isn't a partisan point.' (Journalist)

This mirrors UKICE staff respondents' own sense of journalists' needs and confirms the relevance of an important strand of UKICE's communications strategy and theory of change—engagement of media professionals:

'I think we were very, very successful with journalists during the referendum. I think every single major outlet came to us when they were doing stuff on anything Brexit-related during the referendum.' (UKICE senior staff)

Impact on policy actors and politicians

Policy actors, politicians and UKICE staff respondents reported their views on the needs of the policy community and how UKICE impacted upon these. Three qualities appear to be important here. First, the need for timely provision of broad and deep insight; second, clarity and accessibility of explanation; and third, impartial, policy-neutral and confidential engagement. Together, these qualities helped policy actors to better understand, feel confident about, and think through policy decisions.

In terms of the first quality – timely breadth and depth – both UKICE team and policy actor respondents commented:

‘We spent a lot of time for the first six months explaining to politicians what article 50 meant, for instance. By April 2019, I remember [a UKICE team member] and I were sitting in the House of Commons with 80 Tory MPs trying to explain to them what a customs union was, so it was quite a rapidly moving thing’ (UKICE senior staff)

‘Brexit was obviously a hugely divisive subject, but also a subject that covered literally everything from fish, to security cooperation to, you know, data adequacy, to absolutely everything, and the challenge for the Committee was sourcing academics and experts often at very, very short notice, and also sourcing a good spread of opinion. [...] And it was really, really useful having a very good, close relationship with [the UKICE senior team and colleagues].’ (Policy actor)

In terms of the second quality – clarity and accessibility – multiple politicians and policy actors interviewed described their need for simplified and accessible research on Brexit and post-Brexit issues. For example:

‘They’re quite creative in the way they do stuff. So it’s not too dry, not too academic, though, they’ve obviously got incredible academics, proper academic people, but the way they do it makes it more engaging than a lot of the other organizations I have dealt with over recent years.’ (Policy actor)

‘I think they’re much more accessible than a lot of other academic organizations out there. They have a sort of accessibility to them.’ (Policy actor)

‘[On the UKICE website] you can delve into a huge variety of things. It’s a huge resource for people, not necessarily only other academics [...] and is worth curating and promoting.’ (Politician)

The third set of qualities – neutrality and confidentiality – is more nuanced, in relating to the style of insight provided as well as its content. Several respondents from policy circles, corroborated by UKICE respondents, remarked on the impact of UKICE’s apparent policy-neutrality and approachability for open, discreet discussion. These qualities allowed UKICE to act as a sounding board for policy actors’ deliberations.

‘What you want is a good understanding. [...] And that that helps confirm or otherwise our own thinking. It wasn’t telling us by and large anything we didn’t know. It was a good mirror on the work that we were doing, and gave us some quite useful insight from time to time across every domain of policy.’ (Policy actor)

‘I know of parliamentarians who made use of their services that time just to understand a lot of the issues that were going on. Because nobody was really providing that sort of dispassionate, impartial, factual information. So like, what is a customs union? [...] I think they have positioned themselves effectively as probably the go-to place for factual information.’ (Policy actor)

‘A lot of work we did then was private, in the sense that you don’t tweet about it, talk about it, write about it, you know, meetings with MPs tend to be done under a condition of confidentiality.’ (UKICE senior staff)

Results from the most significant change exercise underscore the impacts described in interviews. These include being able to ‘*test their own thinking*’ (policy actor), pointing out areas for further policy consideration and increasing awareness of political trends. For example:

‘[A UKICE publication] put (often through varying positioned contributions)’both sides of the story’ for the first time, and exposed the parameters of Government policy formulation, and the constraints of negotiations and decision-taking.’ (Policy actor)

Impact on academic contributors

Academic respondents who had contributed to UKICE’s work were asked to describe the needs that motivated their involvement and whether these had been met. Overwhelmingly, reported needs centred on the desire to bring their academic research which, it was reported, may be of niche interest or very technical, into a broader arena. The large majority of these same respondents found that UKICE had met this priority extremely successfully with significant impacts on their work.

‘We weren’t just writing pieces for academic journals to be read by five people, we were engaged in something that was going to be front-facing public engagement, contributing to a live debate about really the future of the UK and these islands.’ (Academic)

‘I don’t think in my career as an academic I’ve come across an initiative that is better at what I consider to be the thing that academics do worst, which is to position yourselves in a way to generate clear, engaging, relevant research in the public interest.’ (Academic)

‘I think what they were uniquely successful at was not primarily generating new knowledge themselves, but really harnessing all that academic expertise that’s already out there, and creating a platform and sort of educating academics in how to communicate that so it reached a much wider audience.’ (Academic)

‘You know that being involved with them will make your research better, get your research heard by more people. So you just want to be involved with them.’ (Academic)

Related to these benefits, several academic contributor respondents described how involvement with UKICE had raised their status as researcher, both as a source of research funding and in terms of the professional credibility it brings. This was achieved, it was reported, both as a result of de facto association with the UKICE brand but, also, as a product of UKICE events and networking opportunities.

‘It had a reputational dimension to it. [...] I think, from the point of view of establishing your credibility as a researcher on Brexit, I think that is really the biggest impact, and then all of the other things are a consequence of that, in some respects.’ (Academic)

‘It got me greater visibility [...] in terms of getting people engaged with the research. That was a really, really important outcome.’ (Academic)

‘UKICE events helped me and my co-authors to form links with politicians. [...] I’ve met journalists, at events [and] been able to follow up with. And then in terms of meeting fellow academics, it is a network of academics as well. And I’ve met people at UKICE

events that I've been able to do things with. [...] It's kind of interesting to reflect on the various ways in which they've been useful to me, because there's actually so many of them.' (Academic)

Responses to the most significant change exercise underscore important impacts on research engagement and visibility, and research funding, as well as the contribution of research to improved understanding of complex issues. For example:

'[UKICE involvement] Enabled me to do research I would not have otherwise been able to do.' (Academic)

'[The most significant change was] much improved access to policymakers, practitioners and media outlets, to communicate my research and contribute to public and political debates.' (Academic)

'[The most significant change was] much more informed discussion about the consequences of Brexit for Northern Ireland. In particular, some of the human rights and equality questions that tend to be neglected.' (Academic)

CHAPTER 3: UKICE'S PROCESSES AND CHALLENGES

The fieldwork probed which processes and mechanisms led to perceived changes, as well as challenges relating to the realisation of UKICE's aims and for the sustainability of UKICE and the replicability of its model. Several important themes were identified and are explored in this chapter.

Impartiality and the UKICE brand

Impartiality is a cornerstone of the UKICE approach and was repeatedly highlighted throughout interviews and programme documentation as an important factor in UKICE's theory of change. Impartiality was identified as one of the programme's main aims in its re-commissioning proposal: specifically, the aim to provide for its users an 'authoritative, non-partisan and impartial reference point.' Impartiality was recognised across all respondent groups as something UKICE has always strived to maintain. It was described as a particularly valuable given the highly polarised nature of debate on Brexit, striving to '*reach across the multiple divides that increasingly frame our politics*' (Academic).

Impartiality is important to UKICE's brand identity. Indeed, UKICE's tagline, as it appears on its website and Twitter profile, enshrine this quality: '*The authoritative source for independent research on UK-EU relations*' (UKICE tagline). Again, on the UKICE website 'About' page:

'[UKICE] provides an authoritative, non-partisan and impartial reference point for those looking for information, insights and analysis about UK-EU relations, that stands aside from the politics surrounding the debate.' (UKICE webpage)

Multiple respondents from across different groups discussed the benefits and challenges of the impartiality characteristic. An important benefit was novelty. Allowing UKICE to 'stand out' from other analysts.

'My impression of talking with general public audiences is they're just grateful for somebody who didn't seem to have an axe to grind.' (Academic)

'People looked and they said, well, there's no record of them taking sides in this debate.' (UKICE team member)

Crucially, non-partisan analysis in written outputs, and particularly UKICE reports, was singled out as of significant value. Overall, the programme's apolitical stance was seen to be maintained over time and across outputs. One academic noted that UKICE continued '*to be relevant, objective, and apolitical*' (Academic), something echoed by other academics and commentators:

'The consistency in taking an apolitical platform based on evidence and research and providing that information. That's really where I want to give the credit.' (Academic)

'The reports go out of their way to be fact-based and reasonable. I don't think they are prone very often to sweeping statements, [they] avoid being associated with one side or other in debates, [and] try very hard to be very much in the middle ground, provide the analysis without taking sides.' (Commentator)

However, maintaining impartiality as part of the UKICE brand was something the UKICE team and academics contributors had to consciously and consistently work at. For example *'communications were very straight [...], grounded in evidence'*, with the team actively *'making sure to monitor what the fellows would be saying and doing'* (UKICE staff). The UKICE team were also careful never to accept invitations to take part in debates where they would be required to put across a particular side of an argument.

There is an important distinction to be made, then, between *impartiality* and a more arbitrary approach that seeks *balance* (in the sense of balancing representation of competing views or claims, regardless of the extent to which they are supported or contradicted by evidence). An academic and a journalist both highlighted how UKICE had managed to successfully navigate impartiality versus balance:

'There's an overwhelming consensus within the profession, that Brexit will be economically bad. And I think they [UKICE] have done a good job in conveying consensus.' (Academic)

'[UKICE] have walked the good line in a very, very politically dangerous and difficult environment. [...] I do genuinely think [UKICE have] done a very good job.' (Journalist)

According to several respondents, this consistent emphasis on intelligent impartiality has established UKICE as a trusted source on issues relating to Brexit:

'They are regarded highly as trustworthy, by all sides in the political debate. All sides want to engage with them.' (Academic)

An additional benefit of this perceived impartiality was remarked upon by one academic respondent, in relation to their professional profile:

'Coming with that [UKICE] sort of brand, alongside our usual individual brands of our names as academics and our university institutional brand, I think that it really quickly became a way to be identified as a source of objective and neutral information and a level of expertise that is very important in these debates. [...] It quickly opened up doors, made us individually and collectively come with a brand that was important at the time, and continues to be important.' (Academic)

The reputation of the UKICE brand for impartiality appeared to be an important factor motivating some academics' continued engagement with the platform, and as such to be crucial for its success and longevity.

Establishing a reputation for impartiality and non-partisanship within policy making circles

Trust has been particularly important for UKICE to build relationships in the political arena. Once UKICE had established its reputation of impartiality, it was able to become, in the words of one academic *'an integral part of the Westminster bubble'* (Academic), which was a key part of its post-referendum strategy noted above. Across the board, respondents from the policy sphere valued UKICE as non-partisan and trustworthy, for example:

'What I want from them is something that says what the reality is, so this is objective, it's not partisan, and therein lies their value.' (Policy actor)

Accounts given by policy actors show that the post-referendum shift in focus for UKICE, from engaging in public-facing debate to focusing on working directly with policymakers, included much behind the scenes advisory work with civil servants and politicians. The success and longevity of this work was based on UKICE being a stand-out non-partisan organisation, as two policy actors noted:

'UKICE is a different beast, other think tanks were almost all coming at it from a particular perspective. And were funded by partisan funding as well. [...] I think [the senior team], by having that neutrality, [were] more help.' (Policy actor)

'We did get some more sceptical voices in through suggestions that [the senior team] provided.' (Policy actor)

The quality and reliability of the UKICE brand in this regard, as described by many of the policy actors interviewed, revolved to a significant extent around the personal qualities and capabilities of the [senior team]:

'[name] was successful in establishing [themselves] as a fair-minded and independent analyst and an expert. [They were] a witness several times before the committee., I think [they] was always very effective. [...] There were certainly some academics who proved more provocative to the committee and who members would often object to if we saw them cited in a report, whereas I felt with citing [[UKICE senior team member], I never got that challenge. [...] It was very valuable, having [name] as an extra resource. [...] It was a very, very useful, valuable relationship for us.' (Policy actor)

Another respondent explained in some detail the ways in which trust in UKICE fed into their work:

'We've written about fifty Brexit reports since 2016. [...] It was very important for us to get the right people coming to give evidence to us, and generally to advise us in the preparation of each of these volumes. [...] Every single one of these reports was a consensus document, so we had to believe the evidence. [...] And in those reports, UKICE [...] was probably larger than any other source. And of course, we weren't just accepting what anyone said to us, we were cross-checking things. [UKICE senior team members] in my view, tended always to get it right. And [they] also very carefully tried to steer a line where you couldn't quite tell what [their] personal views were on many things, and that's been very, very clever, as well. [...] So [they] were an 'unscary' thing to both Brexiteers and Remainers within our Committee, which is also a help.' (Policy actor)

Acknowledging the difficulties, as an organisation working on Brexit, of maintaining a non-partisan reputation, this policy actor gave a succinct appraisal of UKICE's success in this regard:

'It was not their job to take positions or seek to influence public policy. And in my experience, they stayed the right side of that line. By and large, it is a quality analysis of the situation that the country is in. [...] So it was it was helpful and impactful. In other words, their work was used a lot in government.' (Policy actor)

Challenges in maintaining a non-partisan, trusted voice

Some academics did raise some questions, however, regarding the extent to which impartiality and non-partisanship was achieved and what it meant in practice. Whilst it should be noted that UKICE produces a variety of content and works with a range of contributors, including partisan commentators, in order to showcase a range of views, it is possible that this function may be at odds or misunderstood in the wider framing of UKICE as impartial. One respondent expressed concerns about what they saw as a lack of consistency in the impartiality in this regard:

'There were things that could also damage my reputation through being aligned with UKICE [...] The understanding that seemed to be at the heart of UKICE, did actually [...] reproduce some of the debates around who comes to the table in a debate. [...] And there were times where they would publish pieces [...] by people [who headed up] kind of populist platforms [...] These things are not based on anything resembling social scientific analysis of any description. [...]. And so that kind of intermingling of things I found, I did find uncomfortable, and at times I would have to distance myself from UKICE as a consequence of that.' (Academic)

This same respondent went on to reflect that:

'I've seen things change and [evolve] over the time that [UKICE] has been there. [But] there was never a conversation about what partisanship or non-partisanship meant to the people who were central to the project. And that was that was never really communicated to us very carefully. And bearing in mind the differences across the social sciences in terms of how they understand partisanship, I think that could have been, you know, I take my own responsibility for the fact I didn't even ask, so I probably should have asked from the outset.' (Academic)

Relatedly, another academic respondent questioned what they saw to be a lack of diversity in which voices were allowed to speak as UKICE, with a control over messaging that, it was felt, risked skewing output and limiting diversity:

'There was basically just one voice [on that issue], that was it. [...] There was this very close control of the messaging. I don't think it was quality control, it was much more control of identity, the public persona, the brand.' (Academic)

While this was not an issue that was raised widely, certainly it is worth signalling as something UKICE might consider moving forward, in terms of greater reflexivity over which voices or opinion are promoted and how, despite the diversity of its pool of contributors.

Academic expertise and the UKICE brand

Notwithstanding flags about which contributors' voices are promoted or otherwise by UKICE, an important mechanism noted across respondent groups, is the ability of UKICE to pull together a broad range of expertise, through their coordination role and networks:

'I think what they were uniquely successful at was not primarily maybe generating new knowledge themselves, but taking, really harnessing all that academic expertise that's already out there.' (Academic)

From the perspective of UKICE staff, a key strength was their access to a large pool of researchers, which placed them apart from the small teams of experts associated with think tanks, and the limits of individual university press offices:

'The advantage we have over other organizations is in one sense, our staff is almost infinite. [...] We have a pool of expertise that is a lot larger than a think tank with eight staff. [...] I just think journalists found that that appealing.' (UKICE staff)

Indeed, one journalist supported this view, describing UKICE as providing a convenient reference point where a range of expertise and opinion could be found: *'there's someone for everything. They're really, really very broad'* (Journalist). The diversity of academic expertise has also allowed UKICE to remain relevant to key debates as the political climate has shifted, as one journalist commented:

'Everyone just came very early on to trust their judgment based on their knowledge. They're good at spreading their wings, because there's so many aspects to Brexit, but they brought in people who understood the institutions, people who understood the economics, the migration issues. The breadth of what they had to do, the pool of academics from not just one university, made it work.' (Journalist)

This perception was not confined to the media; policy actors also cited the breadth of multi-disciplinary expertise as a strength that set UKICE apart:

'I see UKICE as being halfway between a think tank and a network. In other think tanks, it's quite clear you're in or you're out. It's a defined universe of people. [Senior UKICE staff are] an open source program, and they might not know it, but every single academic who is vaguely interested in any area they cover, is part of [UKICE's] universe. And [UKICE senior team] might look them up and get them involved. And this open source idea, and the neutrality element, marks it out as being a different beast.' (Policy actor)

'I've always just been impressed by the range of disciplines really represented in the room. And I think having one network which brings all of those things together is pretty impressive.' (Policy actor)

In addition, UKICE aimed not only for breadth of expertise, but also to gather the leading experts in key fields:

'Having the range of fellows in a range of issues, who are some of the best in the country on their chosen fields.' (UKICE team)

'You've got a huge range of people. [...] You've got your legal specialists, in relation to Northern Ireland protocol, and so forth, which is a huge strength. I mean, they are the authorities.' (Politician)

'In its first year [UKICE] really proved that it was an expert platform or initiative bringing in excellent scholars from those fields, and that by spanning the whole spectrum of the social sciences, and having that level of expertise, there was a lot of authority in what was produced.' (Academic)

As well as having a large number of experts as part of the UKICE network, the reputation of UKICE experts for providing sound, objective, quality analysis meant that they were perceived

a priori as a trusted source. This was corroborated by a journalist who cultivated contacts with UKICE experts on the basis of a perception that, because of their association with the brand, they would be reliable:

'I think definitely came across people I wouldn't have known existed, because it was a network. And therefore anyone who's involved in that brand, you're going to be interested in, because there must be some kind of clearance process that goes on whereby they monitor people inside, [to check] they are up to it.' (Journalist)

The purposive way that networks were seen to be put together by UKICE, and particularly by its senior team, was identified by some academics and alluded to by policy actors, although not universally in a positive way. One academic spoke positively about what they saw as targeted, proactive networking:

'They're incredibly proactive, they come looking for people doing interesting work in the areas they're interested in. I mean, [senior team member] is a dynamo in this respect.' (Academic)

Specifically, two policy actors had found the way the senior team managed to source not only top-level thinkers on key issues, but also good expertise on more obscure topics, especially valuable:

'One of the places that we go in order to cross-check and get ideas from about who the [Committee] witnesses might be for a given inquiry, was [senior team member]. [...] Often [they] didn't know the answer, but [they] can go away and magically, an answer would come back. [Their] senior lieutenants are very good within that. And there's usually a legal perspective, a more pragmatic perspective, and then some magical person would be produced from a regional university, who happened to know all about some slightly arcane thing. And this was incredibly helpful to us trying to serve up reports.' (Policy actor)

'I think if you're trying to actually identify quite niche areas of sort of research and you're trying to find the right person to talk to about that those kinds of areas, that's somewhere where I think having a sort of parallel network which [the senior team] was leading in UKICE was actually very useful. I think we did manage to access some good quality evidence that we probably would have missed otherwise.' (Policy actor)

This view was not shared universally by academic respondents. Some academics expressed concerns over limited diversity within UKICE networks. Specifically, there was a perception among some that UKICE was more concerned with creating a dense network of key experts across different fields, than necessarily encouraging breadth and diversity in that pool *per se*:

'I'm not sure the programme is as porous as it might have been, you know, between where you can draw in expertise and use that expertise, tended to feel bit more like a closed system.' (Academic)

Another academic respondent agreed, reflecting that *'the program acquired a bit of a reputation [...] that it was a bit of a closed circle,'* that the initial *'breadth and flexibility of the program'* seemed to have been scaled back once the program *'decided on what works'*, which *'kind of set up some boundaries, made it a bit harder for academics'* (Academic). This echoes concerns raised earlier in relation to a singular UKICE voice emerging from what could be a more diverse range of contributions.

UKICE's role as an expertise coordinator

Beyond merely involving a number of experts, a central function of UKICE was to coordinate, direct and match journalists' and politicians' needs with the diverse expertise available to it:

'Ultimately, it's connecting people who do research in universities to people who might be interested in that research.' (UKICE senior staff)

This role was described as an important strength by a range of respondents. As one academic contributor observed, in this area UKICE operates as *'kind of clearinghouse for journalists' requests'*, so rather than having to contact each university press office individually, in the hope they come across the right person, journalists could just contact UKICE, who already have the network of researchers working across different fields, *'which is something that the institutional structures that are typically designed to promote academic research normally can't do'* (Academic).

This was echoed by a journalist who noted the appeal of having a coordinated resource that pulls together expertise:

'I think it's the involvement of academics from many different universities in a single group that is particularly useful. [...] [It] just sort of makes the whole business of interacting with the academic analysis of Britain and the EU very much simpler for somebody who is a journalist.' (Journalist)

Respondents perceived the extensive and effective networking of the senior UKICE team as a key factor in facilitating this coordination: *'people know who they are'* (Politician). In particular, the ability to link a vast network of contacts within academia, with extensive networks in the policy and media arenas, was cited as a key strength, as one politician noted:

'I think that [the UKICE team] are good networkers with politicians and whatnot. They are all on speakers' circuit and the think tank circuit. They're really well connected, more, say, than most academics.' (Politician)

From a policy perspective, this was a highly valued and effective contribution of UKICE:

'We didn't want committees charging into quite sensitive, incredibly complex areas that [...] could not be unravelled without an understanding of the Brexit context, without being able to tie up all these loose ends and make all these connections. [...] And I think we found that having that pool of expertise has worked very well.' (Policy actor)

For one respondent in particular, the senior team came to be trusted not only to give them access to quality, relevant experts, but also to distil a range of expert opinion from a non-partisan standpoint:

'I was able to say to [them], look, I think we're going to be doing something on this this week [...] and [they] were invaluable, [they'd] be able to say, 'I can give you a list of three or four people who I think would be really excellent on this subject. And I can give you a bit of an idea of the spread of their opinion''.' (Policy actor)

UKICE's expertise in media engagement

Media engagement was broadly understood by respondents to be a key pillar of the UKICE strategy, as noted by one journalist:

'The point is the work is really good, but no one would know the work was any good if they didn't have the media strategy to actually get it out there.' (Journalist)

The UKICE team was generally seen as highly competent in this regard: *'they clearly employed people who had experience with the media'* (Academic). Respondents frequently highlighted the capability, expertise and dynamism of the communications team: *'I can't put in strong enough terms how good they are, on that side of things'* (Journalist).

Journalists are identified as a primary stakeholder in the programme's 2019 communications strategy, and are a key pathway for conveying UKICE output. Journalists largely perceived UKICE's engagement with media actors to have been successful, for example:

'It's combination of them not just being good in terms of talking to the media, it's also they understand the needs of the media.' (Journalist)

This understanding was detailed by other journalists as relating to the need for quick response and turnaround, and also in terms of the type of content needed:

'When you get a request for comment, it's no good saying, 'well, I could fit you in next week', because that moment will have passed. And understanding that the brilliant report you released two weeks ago and was completely unreported, and no one took any interest. And then two weeks later, because some minister said something, that's the moment that you need to dive in and suddenly be available for comment. [...] And [the UKICE senior team] understands that. [...] Lots of them are just very good at understanding what the media requirement is, and therefore communicating the material that they've done, which is more academic in nature.' (Journalist)

'The person who was responsible for all that kind of media side of it was also very good, it's a skill to be able to turn academic work into something for journalists who've got very little attention span.' (Journalist)

The UKICE platform was seen to bring the right people together with the *'right level'* (Academic) of analysis:

'The standard is very high [...] pitched at the right level, doesn't assume too much knowledge, doesn't spoon feed you stuff you already know.' (Journalist)

'[With UKICE] you had a good community of people across academia, who were able to produce things to the right standard in a tight timeframe.' (Academic)

One academic described the multi-pronged nature of UKICE's strategic approach to increasing the visibility of specific outputs, and media interest therein:

'They would sort of orchestrate around a set of events and a set of strategies to get [something I had written] to be picked up by the media.' (Academic)

Producing appropriate materials

Media training for UKICE contributors, which – according to the UKICE team – consisted of media training days for fellows and talks by prominent journalists organised for early career researchers, was a relatively minor part of this process. More prominent was the reviewing and editing process, which aimed to ensure all material produced met UKICE standards of accessibility (as well as impartiality), aiming for a writing level in reports and blogs ‘*not too dissimilar to a broadsheet newspaper*’ (UKICE team member). This is something that was noted and appreciated by journalists:

‘I think they’ve put an enormous effort into producing not just, you know, long academic papers [...] but actually shorter, more user friendly papers of the kind that you associate more with some of the political things. And I think that’s been a huge improvement compared to what one might have expected from academics previously.’ (Journalist)

‘They also have very good product, it’s clearly set out, it’s clearly designed to be consumed by non academic specialists [...] I return to it frequently.’ (Journalist)

For their part, academic contributors to the UKICE Hub recognised the expertise of the team in helping them to ‘translate’ their academic work:

‘They would help you, for example, editing blogs in a way that made it more interesting and accessible to media and to the general public.’ (Academic)

‘I learned about working with journalists, I learned about working with policymakers and think tanks, and I never would have got that experience in such a short period of time otherwise, and I have a far greater appreciation now of what it means to work with those people and the conditions under which they’re working, as well as the conditions under which we’re working. So I have a lot of respect for what the UK in a Changing Europe have achieved.’ (Academic)

Media networks and using multiple platforms

The capabilities and reach of the communications team’s networks was seen by some academic respondents as an important resource that facilitated their content being seen and used:

‘They help you in terms of how you write up your research, but also having the contacts in the media, that would then both mean that your articles were also published by the media, or at least picked up. So I think it’s both the relationships and the professionalism of the team, but also in the way in which they influence how you communicate your research.’ (Academic)

The dynamism of the UKICE website and associated content was also cited by one academic as something that set UKICE apart:

‘The UKICE website, you can find whatever you want to find in like one minute, and all the best media websites are like that, very few academic websites are like that. And very few have such regular updates in terms of content. That’s the great thing about UKICE, it feels like a constantly active thing, a constant conversation going on, that there are always five or six things on the horizon. And the regular email, those are great. There’s always like 15

things in there that I want to read. So it feels like an active, living, engaged thing all of the time.' (Academic)

The team's media strategy extended beyond more traditional direct networks, to include a multi-pronged approach across media platforms, which was valued by some academic contributors as something that set the approach apart and created a more impactful media presence. A joined-up media strategy, pushing out outputs across multiple platforms, was noted as laying the foundations for successful engagement and dissemination:

'Often what academics do is they publish something and they write a blog. But it's never picked up ... I think to understand the success [of UKICE] is really part of not just what they did on the website, but all the things that were around and like the videos to Twitter, even did like silly, Tik Tok stuff.' (Academic)

'If you had a blog, on the website, you would have it also in another forum at the same time. So for example, one of my blogs was also a Times article.' (Academic)

'it's when things break out of online into other spaces, where people who aren't following every detail of the political and economic conversation, that's when you get kind of the breakthrough in terms of people being aware of what you're doing.' (Academic)

As well as carefully managing output, UKICE team itself identified as central to its media success the way in which its key figureheads engaged across different media platforms in order to maximise and optimise reach:

'During the referendum campaign we were populist. I mean, give us a choice between Newsnight and the Today program, or Radio Five and BBC Breakfast, we go for the Radio Five and BBC Breakfast, because this was deliberately about reaching a wider range of people.' (UKICE senior staff)

As the debate on Brexit and UK-EU relations shifted post Brexit and – as already mentioned – media engagement became less intense, there did still remain a deliberate strategy within the UKICE team to remain visible:

'We're now sufficiently well-known and entrenched, that we know people won't forget us. Most of us have sort of regular - so I do regular paper reviews for the BBC, and for BBC Radio as well. [...] those are things that keep you in the public consciousness and in the minds of producers.' (UKICE senior staff)

In terms of the public image of UKICE in the media, specifically and significantly, there is a widespread perception amongst different respondent groups that key members of the senior team have been key in establishing the multi-media presence of UKICE:

'[Name] is one of the biggest draws [...] From a communications perspective, [they are] an amazing communicator, able on TV, radio, to distil the complicated issues into everyday language and analogies, which is so brilliant, and that's made [them] such a draw. [...] Then it snowballs after that.' (UKICE senior staff)

'[Senior UKICE team members] are also brilliant. [They] are, of course, the major face of it.' (Academic)

Public facing output

Informing public debate through engagement with audiences via social media has been an important part of UKICE’s public engagement strategy throughout the programme. In the second phase, increasing emphasis was placed on achieving a diverse audience, with the 2018 re-commissioning proposal explicitly setting out an aim: ‘to innovate, particularly with social media in order to engage with harder to reach communities not generally exposed to the best social science research finding.’ However, whether this ambition continues to be relevant to the project’s actual theory of change, post UKICE’s re-commissioning is a relevant question. There appears to be a need for clarification about UKICE’s stated prioritising of public engagement, including engagement with ‘hard to reach’ groups (Director’s review report) versus the clear focus on engaging politicians, civil servants, journalist, business, trade unions and civil society (2019 communications strategy). In its current phase, UKICE seeks only to engage with the public as a ‘secondary stakeholder’. As one academic contributor respondent commented:

‘Things are very sort of Metropolitan focused, very London, [...] very media focused on the parliament side of things [...] I don’t know what goes on in the in the background, but certainly, a lot of the product seems to be tailored for media consumption, rather than necessarily more general public.’ (Academic)

This view was corroborated by a journalist and UKICE team respondent. For example,

‘I wouldn’t regard them as particularly influencing public opinion in Britain. I mean, I’m not sure that’s their job anyway, as far as I’m aware. [...] Their audience seems to me at least to be more other think tanks, government, civil society, you know, politics, and the sort of ecosystem around it all.’ (Journalist)

Taken together, responses on this issue do not suggest that the current focus on media and policy-making communities is out of step with UKICE’s overarching mission or theory of change; however, the apparent disconnection between this and written-down priorities for general public engagement may need to be resolved in future communications and operational plans.

Related to the issue of audience prioritisation, our analysis of the profiles of UKICE Twitter interlocutors suggests that these may be less heterogeneous than UKICE’s stated desires. Table 3 provides a breakdown of the analysis.

Table 3: Analysis of 10 tweets posted by @UKandEU (UKICE)

Number of re-tweets	Followers of those re-tweeting	Characteristics of those ‘re-tweeting’						
		Pro Brexit	Anti Brexit	Brexit Neutral	Brexit Unknown	Academic	Media	Other
120	1148964	1	77	29	14	53	6	62

Although based on only a random sample of tweets, strong consistencies within the sample of 120 of those ‘re-tweeting’¹ these were found (see Annex 4 for further detail). Most

¹ Re-posting an original post to the users’ own network

strikingly, whilst UKICE has been, on one level, successful at engagement through the platform with over 13,000 followers over a two-year period, only 1 of sample 120 people who 're-tweeted' a sample of UKICE posts could be categorised clearly as pro-Brexit. In addition, the large majority of those who re-tweeted a post were assessed as being either an academic or other professional commentator. A minority were from media-related accounts.

Whilst the Twitter profile analysis is far from conclusive about the characteristics of those who engage with UKICE overall, it does suggest that a genuinely broad-based reach may be difficult to achieve. This seems to lend weight to UKICE's current, de facto strategy for audience engagement which is to focus on professional commentators and analysts with the intention of informing technical arguments and policy, rather than shaping hearts and minds – an approach known in policy advocacy circles as inside versus outside track policy work.²

Creating synergy across activities

An important and frequently highlighted strength of the UKICE model and way of working, is the way it synthesises research collation, commission and coordination with dissemination. This was perceived across respondent groups as highly complex work, difficult to get right and rarely achieved. The balance between these strands struck by UKICE in practice was sometimes but not always viewed as successful. Many academic respondents were appreciative of the difficulty of the coordination task undertaken by UKICE:

'I want to emphasize how difficult it is to do that that well and to make it look effortless. It really is tremendously difficult.' (Academic)

Several respondents, particularly academics, highlighted the exceptionality of the way the team worked as a whole, and the way the team worked '*around the whole package*' (academic), which was considered an important factor in what they perceived as UKICE's success. As another academic noted:

'It was a sort of synergy, like we were getting on with our own project, but you were always conscious that you were part of that bigger initiative as well, which given some of the frenzied nature of the debate, was actually reassuring too, you know, to have that involvement.' (Academic)

Journalists who commented on the coordination of outputs were positive about this. They suggested its success hinged upon the timely and accessible nature of briefings, reports and one to one conversations; similarly, for politicians, UKICE successfully provided them with access to expertise immediately and in confidence.

Competing priorities and the need for a comprehensive strategy

However, the challenges of creating synergy across the different areas of UKICE work – including, for example, creation of outputs, media engagement and engagement with policymakers – were not, in the view of a minority of respondents, always surmounted.

² There are many nuances to the notion of inside versus outside track engagement and there is no scope to review these here. For an overview of these approaches see, for example, Dellmuth LM, Tallberg J. Advocacy Strategies in Global Governance: Inside versus Outside Lobbying. *Political Studies*. 2017;65(3):705-723.

Interestingly, criticisms of how this balance was managed came from academic and UKICE staff respondents, but not from journalists or politicians who used the UKICE Hub or engaged in other ways with UKICE.

Two academic respondents noted that, while UKICE funds original research, much of its energy and resource have been placed on media strategy and policy fellows, potentially diverting money away from original primary research.

'My feeling was that, you know, where they can add value relative to other organisation is more through the connections to academia and through more research funding. But to the extent that the kind of media policy stream is more expensive or expensive relative to the research stream, I think that could be rebalanced.' (Academic)

'we might need a bit more research and a bit less commentary, for example, we need a rebalanced blend. And really think hard about capacity building, what kind of researchers we need, and what kind of skills they have.' (Academic)

This reflection was corroborated, to some extent, by UKICE senior staff respondents, who considered that future budgeting priorities should focus to a greater extent on commissioning original primary research. This also reflects changing priorities post-referendum as explored in greater depth below.

The differences in view between UKICE staff, academics, journalists and politicians on the balance between media and research strands of work speak to the diverse and sometimes divergent priorities and needs of these different stakeholder groups (for example, researchers may understandably be more concerned than journalists and politicians about research funding). While, in interviews, UKICE senior staff did not share much critical or strategic reflection on how these different and changing needs should be managed into the future, this should be a central concern for UKICE management, particularly as Brexit and UK-EU relations become less of a focus for media attention.

In terms of the topics on which UKICE focuses, senior UKICE respondents were very cognisant of shifts in public and media interest in UK-EU relations both leading to and allowing for a greater focus on, *inter alia*, continued UK-EU trade, diplomacy, Northern Ireland and UK's relationship to the rest of the world. They emphasised the need to have a clear focus for the identity of UKICE moving forward:

'I think the key thing going forward is its focus [...] It was almost like a start-up and we did so many different things and some things worked, some things didn't. [...] We're not a start-up anymore. I think a clear focus of the purpose of the organisation, and who the organisation is aiming to reach out to, and what it's aiming to do, is critical. [...] I think that is absolutely fundamental for the next stages. It's that clear purpose, [that] has to be unique, and it has to be a value.' (UKICE senior staff).

The development of strategic plans for managing different stakeholder groups' needs, and for determining the topical foci of UKICE in future, is a priority for UKICE management as they reach the end of the second phase of the programme.

Post-Brexit opportunities and challenges for UKICE

Important opportunities and challenges were discussed across respondent groups regarding whether, and if so to what extent, a continued focus on Brexit-related issues remained appropriate post-Brexit. Respondents raised questions around, for example, how far a Brexit-related focus would enable UKICE to sustain its impact and reach, and how UKICE might be reframed to stay relevant.

The need to continue evidence-informed debates on UK-EU relations

Overwhelmingly, respondents across the different groups reported that they wished for, and saw a need for, UKICE to continue in a similar form into the medium and longer terms, perceiving it as valued resource both for themselves and their work, and also for the wider public benefit, for example:

'The UK's relationship with Europe is always going to be a really important issue. I don't think it's settled by any means. And it probably never will be settled because it will change. And therefore the understanding of what's happening and what's going on, is crucially important.' (Politician)

'It'd be a shame to lose the expertise that's been built up. Given that I think it's going to be something the country can draw on again, as we go further, debate what our relations with the EU should be.' (Academic)

'If they stopped now, I think we that would be a big loss, because you need that continuity. And they've proved their worth week by week.' (Policy actor)

One policy actor spoke in some depth about what they perceived to be the unique benefits of the UKICE model:

'Academia is a big, complicated world. I think there's still benefit in having access to a single point of contact you trust, and which provides you with access to a range of views, evidence specialisms, and so on. And I think, whether it's [the senior UKICE team] whether it's UKICE, or whether it's something else like that, given the continuing level of interest in the UK-Europe relationship, I still think that there will be a need, from our side of the fence, for that kind of contact.' (Policy actor)

Yet, many respondents raised the issue of shifting or reducing demand for content related to Brexit and UK-EU relations, due to changes in public and media interest. Journalist respondents were particularly concerned about waning interest among the public in Brexit and related issues. As one noted:

'There is a risk that some people will say we're just not interested in that subject anymore and it's finished.' (Journalist)

In relation to this, other journalists emphasised how UKICE might play an important role in keeping the issue of UK-EU relations relevant:

'The substance of the debate is not going away, it is only just getting going. And I think UKICE would be doing a public service, if it fought to keep the debate alive. [...] Even though you may find they get less hits in the media, or they get less time on question time,

of course they do, there shouldn't be a metric of the thing's running out of steam, or it's failing. It's shifting into something really important. [...] The future of the UK is intimately bound up with the future of its relationship with Europe, which at the moment is only in its infancy.' (Journalist)

'I'd hate to see the UKICE disappear. Because [...] Brexit is an absolutely on-going story. What happens to, say EU citizens currently residing in the UK, how many are going to come back? What's it going to do to labour markets? What's it going to do to investment? [...] We need to find a way, not just the UKICE, everyone needs to find a way to keep engaging with Europe, with the idea that relations with Europe didn't end on the first of January, [...] and we need good, interesting material to be fed into that debate'. (Journalist)

However, another journalist reflected on the potential for UKICE to respond to waning public interest in Brexit-related issues by becoming more demand-led, in the sense of being less concerned with speaking to the interests of the general public, and paying more attention to specific, sectoral needs behind the scenes:

'So I think, I think their biggest challenge will be public interest. But, I guess what they might become more useful to, is actually not people like me, but people in the business and political and economic world, where this stuff is actually a daily issue now.' (Journalist)

Beyond BREXIT and UK-EU relations

There were diverse opinions among respondents on the issue of what UKICE might look like going forward, beyond a focus on Brexit and UK-EU relations. Some were circumspect about the prospect for a UKICE reinvention, for example:

'It's not quite the right name anymore. It's harder to move on, particularly when you've had a very good time, you've been very relevant. Can you move on? Reinvent? Do something different? I think it's going to be difficult'. (Journalist)

'It is going to be a bit of a switch from politics to economics, quite 'business', which can sometimes be harder to communicate, less accessible in a way [...] They're going to be more niche [...] It's a harder sell, it's not going to attract the same media attention.' (Politician)

'Focusing more generally on post-Brexit Britain, I think makes sense, it allows them to keep talking about issues drawing on expertise, maintaining the networks that are there. That is a slightly different mission from the one that it had originally. it's a question really, of the ambition of both the program and of the ESRC, whether they're happy for it to be a bit more in the background.' (Academic)

Yet, several respondents from different groups believed that UKICE could and should be re-framed and its assets re-purposed, even as its original *raison d'être* becomes less relevant, and the majority had no trouble thinking of myriad avenues that UKICE could usefully pursue in the future. Several respondents envisaged a continued need for research and dissemination on the post-Brexit phase of UK-EU relations. The UKICE team itself was keen to describe a potential future for UKICE as broadening out from its past focus, while building on the skills

and connections the programme has made. Intra-UK constitutional issues and the UK's relationship with the rest of the world were viewed as having particular potential:

'I think we are moving in the direction of having probably two to three strands, one, which is what we might call long Brexit, which are the implications for Brexit, on the UK economy, and also the UK polity. And then secondly, the effect of all of this on the UK Constitution, which we think is going to be quite significant, which is Brexit related.' (UKICE senior staff)

'Looking forward, I see three buckets of work. There will be a bucket on the UK domestically, which is everything from the Constitution, to the economy, to politics to evolution, or everything inside these islands. There'll be a bucket that is the UK relationship with Europe. And there will be a bucket which is the UK in the world as a whole. Because actually, foreign policy is quite a big aspect of post-Brexit Britain.' (UKICE senior staff)

It is notable that outside the UKICE team, respondents tended to think the future of UKICE should remain focused on Europe. In terms of maintaining but evolving the focus on continuing UK-EU relations, one journalist suggested UKICE might usefully expand to consider more explicitly the European side of the UK-EU relationship:

'[I would like to see] some of the thinking in continental capitals about the UK, that's always interesting to me. I don't know whether that might be difficult because that's harder to know. But you know, where Paris and Berlin are coming from.' (Journalist)

Significantly, a senior UKICE staff member viewed the shifting terrain as an opportunity for growth, rather than a threat to the future viability of UKICE:

'I actually think we will do our best work over the next three years [...] This is where social science comes into its own. This is where we can be a bit more reflective. We can commission good people to do research, we can actually think longer term.' (UKICE senior staff)

This was echoed by an academic who relished the intellectual opportunities of post-Brexit analysis:

'Even though it's not such a political hot button, it's more academically interesting than it's ever been.' (Academic)

From a policy perspective, one specific theme mentioned by two respondents as particularly relevant for UKICE to pursue moving forward was the issue of divergence; in one case they were already collaborating with UKICE on this:

'If we are using our regulatory autonomy, how far is this taking us away from the EU? How much of this would we have to unpick [...] if we were to look to build a closer relationship in respect of some other area in future? I think that's going to be the heart of the relationship going forward, really. I think it's going to be an absolutely enormous area where we would certainly value the expertise of [the UKICE senior team].' (Policy actor)

'We need to be able to understand divergence. So that means both European Union doing things that are going to diverge from where we were at the start of this year, and UK

doing things that diverge. [...] And so in fact, we have an arrangement with UKICE to monitor that. [Senior team member] has put together a sort of sub team of [their] colleagues. [...] In a political sense, we are now using the machinery that [senior team member] has put together, to actually do something which amounts to an academic resource feeding into us.' (Policy actor)

Importantly, some respondents – especially policy actors – thought UKICE provided a valuable model, that could usefully be applied to other areas of inquiry, as a way of bringing academic expertise into engagement with broader public and policy concerns. For example:

'I think it would be fantastic if similar initiatives were done in other areas, health and the NHS, or other big policy areas with real challenges.' (Academic)

'Applying that to climate, how interesting would that be? There's Brexiteers and remainers, there are climate deniers and climate panickers, there's every element of that, and there isn't a [senior team member] to sew it all together.' (Policy actor)

'If they could bring their convening power to some other conversations, then that'll be valuable. And I think if they continue to do what I think they've done well, which is be that accessible sort of evidence based, factual organization, the kind of organization that can go in and sit in front of a bunch of MPs, and just provide the service they provided. I think that's really valuable.' (Policy actor)

'I think that model does work, in terms of in terms of showing the connections between different areas. I think that is that is really valuable.' (Policy actor)

Insights and risks for academic research

Respondents from across respondent groups pointed to the lessons learned by UKICE about how academics may engage the public more in their work, and what UKICE could teach others. As one journalist commented, *'certainly all academics should look at what they've done and think, 'am I doing enough of the same?''* (Journalist). This view was corroborated by an academic contributor to UKICE:

'It's setting a new standard. I certainly know that in my neck of the woods, it will be a reference point for years to come about this is what a public facing academic project looks like.' (Academic)

Specifically, it was noted that the UKICE team might have particular insights from their experience of the project that it would be useful to share directly with academics:

'What is the secret sauce here? [...] I'd love to have a kind of 'the making of' documentary. How did they figure it all out? Because that that would be great advice for the rest of us.' (Academic)

One policy actor reflected on the possible academic value of the UKICE approach in creating synergy and accountability within other important but disparate research fields, for example on climate change:

'I assume that a net effect of [the UKICE senior team] is that someone at Nottingham, knows someone at Cambridge, knows someone at Exeter, and that actually has really

helped the study of European affairs, academically. And so, I don't know how joined up the whole climate world is, but it would be very interesting, because, you know, I suspect quite a bit of the science needs vigorous peer review. And that might actually help the whole process. [...] It stops you from going down the wrong track.' (Policy actor)

Others found that while, in some contexts, the model may not be wholly replicable, there are certainly lessons learned that could be applied within those other contexts. One academic contributor hoped to be able to take some of the experiences from the program to another academic association:

'I'd like to take some of the experiences from the program, and see if we can do them in a less heavy way with our members, particularly talking about educating people about the European Union. So the European side of it, that stuff that I said was missing. So one of the things I'm trying to work out is how I can do that in a, frankly, a much cheaper way than the program has done.' (Academic)

Limitations of UKICE as a funding model

UKICE tended not to be considered a sufficient model for carrying out and funding primary academic research. Some academic respondents raised concerns about initiatives such as UKICE becoming the go-to model for academic engagement with big social issues, for example: *'it is problematic because basically everyone goes for a quick fix'*, when academic research has got a *'longer pace'* (Academic). Another academic highlighted the challenge of balancing the needs of users with those of researchers:

'Always the challenge was that, as an initiative, it is very much focused on the needs of users, which means that those contributors, academics, have to work to that rather than the other way round.' (Academic)

One academic expressed concern over a specific danger for research posed by reduced diversity of funding:

'There's this perception that was very much sort of a singular approach to Brexit, partly monopolizing all the funding available. Creating a kind of a funnel [...] and basically taking the water out of the pond for the other kinds of research, the opportunity for different kinds of voices.' (Academic)

Echoing concerns outlined previously regarding the selective 'voice' being generated from UKICE research, some academic contributors brought into question how far the primary research being generated by UKICE was actually being capitalised on:

'It wasn't really clear how they were best using the expertise that the ESRC had invested in. That wasn't very transparent.' (Academic)

Indeed, a review of the self-defined research outputs available on the UKICE website (see Annex 3 for full results) reveals only one article (out of seven articles available) detailed findings from primary research. There was also one original analysis of existing data, but the remaining five were reviews and commentary.

One respondent reported that, in their experience, some UKICE-funded research was being side-lined in favour of ‘just one single project with one single head and one specific approach to an issue’, which they found to be ‘an opportunity lost’ (Academic):

‘The body of research has been almost totally detached, there has been no attempt to build a connection [...] to ask is there potential for this project to contribute? [...] If the perspective of the programme is to use research to promote a more informed conversation, you’re losing massively because you’re not using the projects. As a researcher I may enjoy the independence, but I think if I were the funder, that I would be a bit annoyed.’ (Academic)

Limitations to the disciplinary scope of UKICE

Some academics expressed concern that UKICE research has been heavily weighted towards certain, more seemingly ‘relevant’, disciplines within the social sciences, at the expense of others. These focus on the perception that whilst key members of the UKICE team did an excellent job of publicly defending social science expertise and explaining to the public why it matters, some important and relevant disciplines were marginalised within this process.

‘When really making a case for why social science matters, I suppose my concern is just which social science information comes across.’ (Academic)

‘it was very, very notable very early on that there weren’t so many sociologists and anthropologists in the project, it was dominated by lawyers and economists and political scientists.’ (Academic)

In this respect, the UKICE team itself recognizes there have been gaps:

‘We need to do more as an organization to reach out to academics who are working in what people might see as niche areas. [...] we spent four years basically in crisis mode. Well, in the sense that we were sort of hand to mouth, frantically busy, there’s a vote in Parliament, there’s a new European Council. Can we bang off a quick report before me speech next Thursday? That was why actually, now we can be a lot more reflective and considered, I think, and one of the issues we need to think about is tackling those issues that we don’t give enough prominence to, that’s very much on our radar.’ (UKICE team)

The 2018 UKICE extension proposal explicitly states that it sees the key beneficiaries as being the ‘disciplines of politics, economics, law, constitution studies, social policy, and management and business’. It is concerning that whole areas of social science may be seen as ‘niche.’ As one respondent reflected:

‘There’s a lot of social science work still to be done on Brexit. [...] I think that the important thing to maintain at the heart of it, is that it’s not just politics. And it’s not just economics, it’s people’s lives. [...] I would like to see that space being open to all the social sciences, and kind of documenting and creating knowledge for posterity, about what happened in this massive social and political transformation in Britain.’ (Academic)

Limitations to the critical engagement of UKICE

A concern raised by some about the selectivity of UKICE outputs can be viewed as a concern about the overall thinking behind what research is considered relevant. Academically, the

program was seen by some as being quite conventional in terms of the kinds of social science it engaged with, and as failing to *'take on critical perspectives'* (Academic). A concern about the gender-blindness of the UKICE platform, and a failure to engage in the gendered aspects of the issues being debated, was mentioned by some academics. The UKICE team was aware of and had reflected on this issue, which they related to how proactively they engage face-to-face and try to lead rather than follow debates:

'We did try a couple of times [...] organized an event that touched on gender issues. And that was difficult and didn't get a great audience. And that was then the rationale. Well, we tried it, it, people didn't really care. So we shouldn't really try it again. And yeah, there is that question about how much you should be following the debates and leading the debates. And, yeah, sometimes I think probably the balance was not quite what it should have been.' (UKICE senior staff)

Yet perhaps more concerning to academics was that diversity was not being reflected in the research being done within UKICE:

'There was also a problem with gender. And there was a problem with people, you know, representing colour and making sure that they were there and in the project. There were certain topics, so like, there was no big project on gender, so we are going to end up with quite an incomplete, we're always going to end up with an incomplete record of Brexit and its impact in respect to the, kind of, those just, you know, diversities and disparities.' (Academic)

While issues of gender blindness were mentioned only by some respondents, and race blindness by even fewer, the consideration is extremely important, both normatively and empirically and ties in with wider observations about how voices are selected and profiled within UKICE's outputs. Thus, it is important to flag this as an area of opportunity for UKICE to engage with in the future.

Risks for academics of public engagement

Public engagement is not without risks, and a small number of academic respondents spoke of the potential personal downsides of having an increased public profile, which act to dissuade them or others from sharing their expertise through public outreach and engagement. Trying to engage with the wider public through social media in particular was seen by some to risk backlash when a) dealing with a particularly contentious subject within already heated and polarized debates, or b) being a woman. In terms of the former, constitutional issues around Northern Ireland were the backdrop to the following comment by one academic:

'A lot of academics are not comfortable in the public sphere, and that's been heightened, I think, by Brexit. To be candid, they've seen what has happened to some colleagues who stepped into those debates, and why would you need that in your life?' (Academic)

In terms of risks to women with public profiles, although it was not an issue mentioned widely, the two academics who reported having experienced online abuse relating their UKICE contributions were both women:

'I actually had a very unpleasant experience with that. [...] We did one piece that was just picked up a lot. And caused quite a lot of debate on Twitter and was also in the Daily Mail

and retweeted by Nigel Farage, and it got tens of thousands of comments on Twitter, and it was quite unpleasant, but just because it really played into this polarizing atmosphere. [...] But I think, in particular, as a female academic, you can get quite a lot of abuse, which I did do in that instance. And I think that did put me off, I'm sure I could have had even more impact. [...] It did put me off a little bit, or certainly makes you realize the cost of doing that.[...] I was shocked by the outcome.' (Academic)

'I had a difficult situation with a social media incident that went completely the wrong way. [...] Even back then I don't think I was surprised. But I think that it's just so overwhelming when you have such a huge sort of reaction, especially when you think that you've come with objective and apolitical analysis. One thing is regarding the Brexit debate and the positives and the negatives of that debate, but there are also elements which are permanent, so you have a female, non-British expert on social media, you will get unpleasant experiences.' (Academic)

Both these women spoke positively about how these incidents were dealt with by the UKICE team (*'they did quite a lot to try and end that. I think they handled it well'; 'it was fantastic to have [...] UKICE back me up in that situation'*), but there was no sense that the potential risks of abuse had been pre-empted. There may be a degree of fatalism at play here: a view that the online abuse of women is inevitable. One male academic, who was the only other respondent to flag this issue, noted that *'on social media, if you're a man, you tend to be much less a target of abuse, you know, this is known. You can be opinionated, but you're much more protected'* (Academic).

Sustainability and replicability

It was widely commented by respondents that UKICE as it currently operates, and indeed to a large extent much of its success, depends considerably on the capabilities and qualities of the senior team. As one academic commented: *'Having those people who are very good doing it made a massive difference, a couple of different people at the top would have made it real damp squib'* (Academic). In particular, the central role the senior team has played raises concerns as to the sustainability or replicability of the UKICE model. Overall, it is not straightforward to consider the 'UKICE model' separately from the specifics of its current operation and leadership team. One policy actor spoke about how, in their view, the key value-added of UKICE hinges largely on the senior team:

'If UKICE went, work on Brexit obviously wouldn't stop and you'd still get a lot of academics looking at the different dimensions of it, but I don't think you'd get that quality of the interface into the public space that UKICE has been able to bring. [...] And I suspect credit for that lies particularly with [the senior team], and I think they've done that very successfully. There is no other academic grouping that achieves anything like the same profile.' (Policy actor)

This is something UKICE has reflected on and it trying to pre-empt:

'I think it has been a risk. I think it's far less of a risk now because actually, one of the very welcome changes that's taken place over the last year, is that we've got we've now got two deputy directors, we've got a senior leadership team [...] So I think it's far, far less of an issue for the organization now than it was during the sort of Brexit madness years.' (UKICE senior staff)

Yet it was not clear that having a senior leadership team in place had changed significantly how UKICE operated internally:

I think that the space for having something that's a more collective approach was a bit limited. [...] The centrality of [parts of the senior team].. I think is both the strength and the weakness of the program.' (UKICE senior staff)

Another member of the UKICE team was realistic about the extent to which the current model could be reproduced under new leadership, but reflected that UKICE could grow in new directions:

'I think another academic might not be as successful in some areas. I'm sure about that, but they'll be more skilled and capable in other areas. I don't necessarily know what they are. [...] But if you've got someone who focuses on something else they'll hopefully produce results in that other area. I think there are probably, I don't know, off the top of my head, maybe a dozen or so academics that could, they wouldn't necessarily replicate what [the senior leadership] is doing. Because everyone's different. [...] I think that the key thing is having that drive to constantly work, constantly want to do new things, try new things.' (UKICE senior staff)

This perspective was echoed by a policy actor, who reflected on the sustainability of UKICE as a model beyond the senior leadership team:

'As a model, it's really worked. But it might be that the model largely worked because the spider at the centre of the web was a particular person. And I suspect that [the senior team is] quite unusual. But it doesn't stop the model from being a very interesting, extremely helpful model, at least from the political side.' (Policy actor)

Across respondent groups, there was agreement that the UKICE team, in particular its senior team, have worked with a lot of energy, investing large amounts of hours and passion in their work. This attests to their dedication to the project. Yet, an important corollary to this observation is that it would be challenging to replicate or sustain the UKICE model without staff with similar levels of commitment, skill and productivity.

'Someone's only got a finite amount of time in a day, and [senior team member] spends twenty hours a day doing UKICE.' (UKICE senior staff)

'I really want to give a lot of credit to the team that runs the program. My experience has been that they're working way too hard. And with the resources, if it had been in my department, we would have achieved only half of what these guys have had managed to do.' (Academic)

'It's clear there's been a huge investment of personal time, as well as the bits that were paid for, so I think there's been an absolutely massive return for that investment.' (Academic)

While it is acknowledged that senior level positions in a programme of this sort are likely to come with significant time demands, the issue is flagged here for consideration in terms of how the team is funded, resourced and managed in the future. Indeed if such a model were to be replicated in other contexts, these considerations should also be made.

CONCLUSIONS

1. UKICE was largely successful at meeting its aims and objectives

Overall, the findings indicate that the main aims and objectives of the programme were met and specific sub-objectives have largely been met. Table 4 provides a summary of evidence gathered in relation to each of the aims and objectives of the programme.

Table 4: Summary of evidence against key aims and objectives

UKICE main aim	Evidence
1. To promote rigorous, high quality and independent research into the complex and ever-changing relationship between the UK and the European Union;	UKICE has become a key source of funding for academics working on related areas and has also engaged a broad, diverse network of researchers, creating a pool of expertise which is highly valued across user groups.
2. To provide authoritative, non-partisan and impartial reference point for those looking for information, insights and analysis about UK-EU relations that stands aside from the politics surrounding the debate.	Across the board, the impartiality consistently achieved in UKICE outputs was recognised as a key point of value and something that set UKICE apart from other comparable research organisations, and established it as a trusted brand. Yet notably some academics raised concerns as to what impartiality looked like for UKICE, and how it impacted on decisions over which voices were excluded.
UKICE specific objective	Evidence
1. To produce outputs easily accessible to policymakers, businesses, journalists, civil society organisations, educational institutions and the general public who are interested in the UK's relationship with the EU and its implications for UK internal domestic politics and the economy	Several respondents, across groups, indicated that research outputs were accessible, high quality, well written and used by politicians and journalists. Our review of research outputs by UKICE also indicates high levels of clarity, impartiality, and breadth and depth of analysis. However, less evidence was found of engagement by and with civil society organisations and the general public.
2. To host events at which social scientists participate alongside key non-academic stakeholders, such as policymakers and the media, to ensure an effective exchange of information and knowledge	A variety of events and engagements were discussed positively by respondents from across groups, particularly for harnessing a range of perspectives. However, post-Brexit, there was less of a focus on face-to-face events and more of a focus on engaging with journalists and politicians.
3. To innovate, particularly with social media in order to engage with harder to reach communities not generally exposed to the unbiased and impartial social science research findings	Primarily, engagement was attempted via its primary and secondary stakeholders – journalists and politicians – rather than directly with 'harder to reach' publics. This evaluation did not find evidence that UKICE was particularly effective at directly reaching the general public (i.e. those outside of media and policy circles) on social media, nor any

	evidence of concerted or successful direct targeting of ‘hard-to-reach’ groups within that.
4. To facilitate the impact and engagement work undertaken by social scientists both in the UK and elsewhere, enabling them to communicate their research to key stakeholder groups and the general public	Evidence suggests that UKICE were most successful at meeting this objective, particularly in developing and refining their working model, which coordinates academic research with media and policy engagement.

Nonetheless, there are fundamental issues to consider in terms of the scope of the overarching aim of UKICE to ‘provide a public forum [...] to contribute [...] to ongoing public and political debates’. In particular, questions around the extent to which UKICE does, and indeed should, engage directly with the public remain to be resolved.

Findings suggest that while direct public engagement remains a putative priority for UKICE leadership, with reaching ‘hard-to-reach’ groups a specific aim of the second phase, this has in fact become less central to UKICE’s activities. The evaluation did not find evidence that UKICE has specifically targeted, or been successful in targeting, ‘hard-to-reach’ communities: its primary constituency appears to be those who already take an interest in its topical foci. It would be beneficial for a clear, explicit decision to be made on whether this will be a priority in any future iterations of UKICE. Going forward, decisions to invest or divest resources in this area should be informed by reflective analysis of how UKICE can best leverage its strengths to meet deeper strategic challenges as public and media interest in Brexit declines. Any funding decision has an opportunity cost and it may be that, for example, better value for money would be achieved by grasping opportunities to produce more primary research.

One area that could certainly be strengthened, if public engagement continues to be a priority, is monitoring and evaluation of the impact of public facing work, for example through post-event surveys or interviews with participants. Given the very limited data collection on this to date, the impact of these types of UKICE engagement activities is not well understood. While demonstrating the utility and effectiveness (or otherwise) of this type of engagement is notoriously difficult, there is scope for UKICE to employ more robust methodologies.

2. UKICE was valued by stakeholders and made some strong impacts on the work of key stakeholder groups

There was broad consensus among respondents and across respondent groups that UKICE provided an effective response to demand for what one academic respondent described as ‘public facing impactful research outputs’. Key stakeholder groups whose work the model sought to impact included journalists, policymakers and academia. Each group gained different benefits from their interaction with UKICE. Journalists reported that their outputs were improved and their understanding of UK-EU relations more nuanced. Policymakers reported that their work was supported through impartial, confidential and trustworthy advice, allowing them to think through policy challenges. Academic contributors reported that their work was provided a more visible platform.

3. UKICE developed a unique and largely effective model, but there are challenges in replicating and sustaining this model

An interesting set of lessons about UKICE as a model of working at the intersection of research and practice emerged from this study. These are of interest to research funding organisations as well as research institutions and universities. UKICE was a) able to establish itself as a trusted 'brand' through its well-defended reputation for impartiality and trustworthiness, which b) attracted journalists and politicians amongst its users, and as such c) increased their access to high quality research and researchers. These aspects of the model reinforce each other: good researchers want to work with UKICE because it attracts a high profile audience and vice versa. However, this strength also implies a weakness: should any aspect of this model alter (most relevantly, because there is a decline in interest in Brexit), there is a risk that other elements are also affected.

While there is some evidence that UKICE sought to ignite interest or tap into latent demand for its work through mainstream media in particular and also face to face events, it is still unclear whether the model will continue to be as effective as public interest shifts away from Brexit. This also implies that the model may not be transferable to topics that are of less interest to the media and the wider public.

Regardless, there are general lessons to be learnt from the model, which may be applied to topics that are similarly high profile. This may be particularly relevant if emergent threats and opportunities are realised, for example, those relating to a decline in trust in politics and a saturated information environment. Some lessons learned could in theory be applied within any research institution, such as, for example, applying principles of accessibility and impartiality in their output, or engaging a dedicated media team on potentially high profile issues. One aspect that really set UKICE apart was its coordination role: it created a uniquely broad, high quality network of academics, which it purposively coordinated with networks of politicians and journalists; importantly, contact was not only facilitated through this network but also *filtered* in terms of quality (a process not without its drawbacks, see below).

In terms of the sustainability and replicability of the UKICE model, it is hard to judge which of the ingredients that make up the UKICE recipe is the most important or irreplaceable. A significant issue is the central role of the qualities and capacities of the current leadership as well as the expertise of the wider team. Although some elements of the model are clearly transferrable, for instance the importance of dedicated communications support, others are unique to UKICE in the context of Brexit. This implies significant challenges in sustaining and replicating the UKICE model in future and in other contexts.

4. UKICE has successfully responded to a variety of stakeholder needs and demands

The data gathered robustly demonstrates that UKICE met demand for its outputs, including previously untapped demand, particularly during the height of the Brexit debate and media interest. During the peak of interest in Brexit, UKICE was able to hone its model of working with academics, journalists and politicians. However, the key driver of demand for UKICE's work has changed, as Brexit becomes less of a political or media 'hot topic'. This implies that the experience of working for or within UKICE may change, if the organisation changes from one that is called upon daily for comment to one that must seek out consumers of its work more proactively.

While the networks of connections UKICE has built up as a result of its busy Brexit phase can continue to be used to raise the profile of UKICE's outputs, and there is interest from both journalists and policy actors for UKICE to continue, there is a clear risk that this will be harder

to do as time goes on. Given this, UKICE must decide how it will identify and pursue suitable topics for research and particularly whether media-defined interests or those arising from within its research community or other sources (such as business) will drive these. While these questions were far less relevant during peak interest in Brexit (as interests collided), they are now central to working out UKICE's new *raison d'être*. An issue to be addressed in terms of the business model moving forward is how to allocate funding across media-engagement and primary research strands.

Brexit produced a particularly urgent demand for this kind of interface, and to a large extent the agenda and working model of UKICE was shaped by shifts in the public and policy spheres. This required the programme to be flexible, and while there was evidence of this need being managed with success, the inevitable shifts in focus over time could be more pro-actively integrated into the overall planning and operations models. Discussions in this regard may include reducing reliance on consistent public interest, and engaging with debates in new ways. The findings indicate that UKICE tapped into needs among all user groups that went beyond Brexit. There is scope, therefore, to reflect on how far this model could be replicated for other contentious, high profile topics.

5. UKICE has responded to clear demand for research on Brexit and UK-EU relations, but there is opportunity to improve engagement with marginalized areas of study

UKICE was established with the clear intention of responding to a specific set of debates relating to Brexit. Its research agenda has therefore, thus far, primarily been limited to Brexit-related topics. However, some respondents raised concerns as to the voices that were being excluded from UKICE outputs, both in terms of UKICE's focus on more mainstream, less critical approaches to some key areas of debate, and in terms of exclusion of thematic areas that are treated as marginal to debates, but nevertheless may be important from an intellectual and policy perspective. A particular area of opportunity is increasing the visibility of gender and race in the public debate on Brexit and UK-EU relations, through all areas of UKICE's work. In addition, while UKICE academic networks are broad and far-reaching compared to other organisations, some academics had the view that it was very much a closed system and that diversity within this network could be improved.

The role of UKICE not only as a coordinator but also as a filter of research is, in this sense, potentially problematic. Moving forward, it would be helpful if more systematic consideration were given to how marginal or critical voices or concerns may be proactively included, where these are grounded in evidence.

ANNEX 1: RESULTS OF A HORIZON SCANNING EXERCISE

A changing information environment

Emergent challenges relevant to UKICE include:

- Reduction in audiences' ability to assess the quality of media content and information
- Responding to complex economic and social challenges within democratic society makes coordinating collective action difficult
- An increasingly saturated information market

Those living in contemporary, technologically rich societies have more access to information now than at any point in history. This presents both significant opportunities and challenges for organisations operating in the field of information. While new technologies and social changes make information more widely accessible, the abundance of this information and other changes brought about by new technologies highlight new challenges in systems of information production, communication exchange and truth claims. As Marshall and Drieschova highlight 'although information has become easier to attain and is available in unprecedented quantities, there is less capacity to determine its quality' (2018: 90). This presents significant challenges specific to organisations such as UKICE who must navigate this new information environment, creating work which both maintains their commitment to impartiality and robust research, while remaining accessible and engaging for a wide variety of stakeholders.

Seger et al. (2020) emphasise how access to reliable information is crucial to 'the ability of a democratic society to coordinate effective collective action' when responding to complex economic and social contexts. They introduce the concept of 'epistemic security', by which they mean the 'the processes by which societies produce, distribute, evaluate and assimilate information, and ... threats that restrict access to information, or undermine our ability to evaluate information veracity or information source reliability'. In doing so, they identify a set of 'epistemic threats' which challenge this security. These threats include blatant censorship efforts or misinformation campaigns, the erosion of trust in expertise, a saturated information market, and growing economic inequality. For organisations such as UKICE, which aim to provide a non-partisan and impartial intervention into the information environment, these challenges must be taken seriously when considering the future of the programme.

Censorship and misinformation

Emergent challenges relevant to UKICE include:

- Public trust in and access to information challenged by unreliable sources
- Bots used to influence public opinion
- Proliferation of fake news impacts public confidence in sharing real news

Researchers have identified significant threats to social relations and economic decision-making as a result of growing complexities and unreliability in the information environment. Access to and trust in reliable and non-partisan information is challenged by the growing international industry in fake news, as clickbait and hyperpartisan sites continue to publish false information and in some cases manufacture hoaxes, sometimes with the aim of monetising clicks on sites (Geçkil et al. 2020). In the specific context of information on the EU and Brexit, there are multiple alleged instances of hacking and bots being used to influence

public opinion. A study on the use of bots in the EU referendum campaign found they played ‘a small but strategic role in the referendum conversations’ (Howard and Kollyani 2016: 1), in particular with regard to supporting the dominance of hashtags associated with arguments for leaving the EU.

Not only does the proliferation of this type of misinformation and disinformation present a challenge in terms of accessing reliable information, recent research has also suggested that as a result of the increase in concerns around fake news, people may be less inclined to share news of any type on social media, which could ‘ultimately sap public debate on real news across various social media platforms’ (Yang and Horning 2020: 8). This is obviously significant for social media companies, but also news organizations, policymakers and society as a whole because of the importance of public debate for a robust information environment.

As the question of the UK’s engagement with the EU continues to remain a contentious topic, both on and offline, misinformation around the relevant issues seems likely to continue to be a feature. Organisations wishing to provide an intervention into this information market must then continue to be aware of this. However, this also provides an opportunity for a project such as UKICE, which has built up a reputation based on expertise and reliability, to use this as a way of pushing through what is undoubtedly a saturated information market and positioning themselves as an authority in the context of UK-EU relations.

Erosion of trust in political expertise

Emergent challenges relevant to UKICE include:

- Decline in trust in political discourse leads to decreased engagement
- Expertise is seen as less reliable

The decline of trust in political discourse has far-reaching consequences for organisations such as UKICE, because, as Marshall and Drieschova (2018: 100) suggest, such conditions result in people making decisions ‘based on information which has been designed to generate emotional arousal’ yet ‘is inaccurate.’ The empirical challenge presented by this with regards to the uptake of certain forms of information means that engagement with resources based on facts and statistics have less engagement, and circulate less widely.

Several other scholars also describe a shift away from a mode of politics that relies on or employs verifiable facts towards one that operates through appeals to emotion and personal belief (Lynch 2017, Lewandowsky et al. 2017). While well-informed and timely decision-making requires knowledge drawn from a variety of sources, including experience, memory, reason, and most of all, a diverse assortment of testimony, the erosion of trust in expertise presents significant challenges for an organisation grounded on the expertise of social science researchers. The challenge for UKICE then remains to maintain a solid grounding in expertise and robust research, while also taking seriously the concerns around lack of trust in expert research and a desire to move away from traditional news sources. In order to respond to a shifting public and media agenda with research still grounded in fact, organisations working in this context must be aware of not only how the environment is changing, but also what influences information consumers, and how news is disseminated and circulated.

A saturated information environment

Emergent challenges relevant to UKICE include:

- Saturated information market caused by rapid transformation of the media landscape requires constant innovation of communications techniques
- Consumers are presented with a huge range of competing sources and attention is stretched more thinly

As Lewandowsky et al. highlight, 'no contemporary analysis of societal trends can be complete without commenting on the rapid transformation of the media landscape' (2017: 7). Whereas previously the public may have had access to a limited but relatively unchanging set of information offerings, today they are confronted with 'a plethora of competing, often chaotic, voices online' (Lewandowsky et al. 2017: 7). Therefore for organisations such as UKICE, there is a need for constant technological and media innovation to push through a highly saturated information market. As Cismaru et al. (2018) highlight, 'the current sharing society demands constantly acquiring new digital skills, especially as new means of communication and interaction between individuals are emerging at a fast rate'.

People are increasingly flooded with more and more avenues of information gathering, as the time dedicated to online activity also increases. This information abundance means the attention of information recipients is stretched more thinly, as competing demands on their engagement grow. This makes it harder to ensure important information reaches all important parties, leading to what Seger et al. (2020) describe as 'an attention economy', in which trade-offs must be made between 'the truth-orientation of information and attention-grabbing strategies'. As Cismaru et al. (2018) highlight, 'as younger publics incorporate the digital media into their lives at a more profound level, not necessarily focusing on their utility, but rather on the experiences they provide, it is extremely important that communication practitioners dealing with these publics enhance their level of understanding of digital media use'.

This saturation of information producing technologies, as well as an increased level of mediation between sources and consumers (such as social media, content aggregator sites etc) also make it more difficult to evaluate the trustworthiness of individual information sources (Seger et al. 2020). This presents a challenge to organisations such as UKICE who rely on a reputation as a source of reliable and expert information, as they risk being sublimated into an ever-updating timeline of news, with few tools for the consumer to distinguish between resources based on robust research and those which are not.

Growing economic inequality

Emergent challenges relevant to UKICE include:

- Increased social inequality causing increased political polarisation
- This leads to insular communities more likely to reject information which challenges their own views, and more likely to accept fake news

The changing social landscape of the UK also presents a challenge for the future of organisations such as UKICE. There is a growing body of literature which identifies strong links between social and economic inequality with political polarisation (Lewandowsky et. al. 2017, Winkler 2019). As the former seems set to continue to increase in the UK (ONS 2021), increased political polarization will continue to be a challenge for organisations working in these contexts. A key focus for UKICE has been the maintenance of a non-partisan and impartial approach to a polarising debate. However, as the political landscape in general and debates around the EU in particular become increasingly focused on the margins, there is an increased likelihood that insular communities emerge and persist, who are more likely to

reject information that challenges their accepted views (Seger et al 2020). This strong in-group identity can then lead to greater polarisation between groups, causing more challenges for balanced information sharing. Additionally, research on political misperceptions suggests that fake news is more easily accepted by people who are highly partisan (Taber and Lodge, 2006), suggesting that this move towards increased political polarisation may have far-reaching impacts on the broader information environment.

ANNEX 2: RESULTS OF A MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE EXERCISE

Most Significant Change is a technique for identifying and exploring programme outcomes and results that are important for those most affected by a programme. Following interviews, we asked interviewees to react to six short questions: 1) What was the thing UKICE did or produced? 2) What was the change? 3) Who did the change happen to? 4) When did the change occur? 5) Why was this a significant change? 6) How specifically did UKICE facilitate or contribute to this change?

A total of 12 respondents provided complete information in response. One respondent replied that changes were not significant but peripheral, albeit useful, and two replied that they had not experienced any significant changes as a result of UKICE. The information provides useful case studies in how UKICE outputs are used, outlined in the table below.

Table 5: Results of the Most Significant Change exercise

Respondent group	What was the thing UKICE did or produced?	What was the change?	Who did the change happen to?	When did the change occur?	In your view, why was this a significant change?	How specifically did UKICE facilitate or contribute to this change?
Policy actor	Technical work on the on the Northern Ireland protocol.	An area where I thought their impact was greatest. And I think that's in terms of ongoing support and expertise	Brexit committee	On going	it's not really made a difference. But I think it's something that we've hugely valued as a resource in a very difficult time, in a very, very difficult polarized debate.	I think UKICE have produced some very good analysis of the protocol. I think that's as far as I could go, really in terms of identifying, you know, In fact, one thing.
Policy actor	Series of reports that	Bringing together lots of different dimensions. Those	Self and colleagues	2018/2019	We wouldn't necessarily agree with everything, and it didn't	The stuff they produce by and large is

Respondent group	What was the thing UKICE did or produced?	What was the change?	Who did the change happen to?	When did the change occur?	In your view, why was this a significant change?	How specifically did UKICE facilitate or contribute to this change?
	were looking at the possible post-Brexit futures	were incredibly helpful. Because they there are sort of a good ready reckoner of what that will look like.			necessarily tell us anything we didn't know. But it allowed us to test our own thinking.	informative, and accurate. Certainly when I was in the House, I could test what they were saying against what we knew. And that stuff was always generally very much on the map. And they're not shy of allowing different views to be to be heard.
Policy actor	Creation of advisory group on divergence.	In 2021 and beyond, we need to be able to understand divergence as part of our European Affairs roles. We have an arrangement with UKICE to monitor that.	EU Select Committee, House of Lords	Ongoing	There's been quite a clever dividing up of what types of divergence there are, and then they just update each of these twenty areas. It really is the radar screen that will tell us where we should consider doing further work, or	It was an iterative thing [...] it was our thinking as refined by [the Director], and then [the Director] found people to do it. [...] some of whom are obviously right at the start of

Respondent group	What was the thing UKICE did or produced?	What was the change?	Who did the change happen to?	When did the change occur?	In your view, why was this a significant change?	How specifically did UKICE facilitate or contribute to this change?
		In a political sense, we are now using the machinery that [the Director] has put together, to actually do something which amounts to an academic resource feeding into us.			in simply tapping on the shoulder of a sister committee in the Lord saying, 'Well, you need to look at this element of the climate, or that element of justice and home affairs, or whatever.	<p>their careers, but they're very, very bright.</p> <p>If it turned out that UKICE wasn't there, we would have to replicate that somehow or other. Because it's now become a feature of, [what we need to look at] over the next two to three years, at least. Our Committee, people from every bit of the spectrum, did feel that it was a very good thing.</p>
Politician	Publication of the Brexit Witness Archive	It put (often through varying positioned contributions)'both sides of the story' for the first time, and exposed the	Me	2020 to date	threw light on the essentially 'political' juxtapositions of personalities and policy options-living history!	I think one of the great strengths of UKICE, it that it is very, promiscuous, intellectually.

Respondent group	What was the thing UKICE did or produced?	What was the change?	Who did the change happen to?	When did the change occur?	In your view, why was this a significant change?	How specifically did UKICE facilitate or contribute to this change?
		parameters of Government policy formulation, and the constraints of negotiations and decision-taking				
Journalist	Reports on costs of no-deal	It was when preparing two big articles on what would happen if there were no trade deal after Brexit and relied quite heavily on pieces from UKICE on the cost of no deal	Me and also colleagues less well-versed with EU matters	Over 12 months ago	Because much of the coverage of no deal had assumed that trading with the EU on WTO terms alone would be relatively straightforward, which suggested a failure to grasp the significance of the EU's single market	By providing enough analysis and experts on issues like rules of origin, regulatory alignment and EU law to help with our reporting on the risk of a no-deal Brexit
Journalist	Consumption of UKICE content several times a week over the past few years.	Improved understanding of the nuances of Brexit and various impacts of it on trade, and other relations with the EU and member states. This resulted in higher quality reporting as journalists in my	I experienced this change personally having worked with UKICE or consumed its content	Over 12 months ago	It helped the new organisation I worked for's readers and viewers have a deeper understanding of the complex issues thrown up by Brexit and the new relationship the UK has forged with the EU.	It provided helpful explainers, videos, tweets and expert analysis in the form of reactive comment.

Respondent group	What was the thing UKICE did or produced?	What was the change?	Who did the change happen to?	When did the change occur?	In your view, why was this a significant change?	How specifically did UKICE facilitate or contribute to this change?
		organisation and others looked to UKICE as the go to experts on a range of subjects who could distill complex subjects into succinct soundbites.				
Journalist	Report on affluent leavers, and others	very useful, insightful piece of research. If I see there is a UKICE report [on the area I'm writing about], I will be in advance grateful for that fact, and look forward to reading it. Whereas lots of things get written about lots of things. So that's not a normal, not a default position.	Me	Over 12 months ago And Ongoing	I am particularly glad when I read something and a point is made that is not just giving me the data that I need, but it's drawing it together and making the analytical observation that isn't a partisan point.	There's an awful lot of unintelligible turgid, beside the point, academic writing out there, if you go looking for it, they have avoided that trap, so I don't know how they've done that, but they've definitely done it. So you know, well done.
Academic	Research funding	I received several grants from UKICE/ ESRC to carry	Me plus colleagues.	In the last 12 months	Enabled me to do research I would not have otherwise been able to do.	UKICE specifically encouraged people to apply for grants on this

Respondent group	What was the thing UKICE did or produced?	What was the change?	Who did the change happen to?	When did the change occur?	In your view, why was this a significant change?	How specifically did UKICE facilitate or contribute to this change?
		out research on public opinion towards Brexit.		Over 12 months ago		topic. The people at UKICE (not the central ESRC people) were extremely helpful in a) encouraging submission of grant applications and b) the grant application process. UKICE also c) helped to organize public events at which our research could be presented and d) organized collections of research findings, including our own, for dissemination to the media. (c) and (d) would have been very difficult to do on our own.

Respondent group	What was the thing UKICE did or produced?	What was the change?	Who did the change happen to?	When did the change occur?	In your view, why was this a significant change?	How specifically did UKICE facilitate or contribute to this change?
Academic	Publish my research	Increased visibility of research and policy analysis outputs.	Myself, my research team and my research centre (CEP)	Over 12 months ago	It increased the exposure of our research, by disseminating our work to a broader audience than we usually have access to.	By publishing and publicizing our work through including our findings in their reports, publishing our blog posts on their website, linking to our work via social media and publicizing our work to their press contacts.
Academic	New networks	Much improved access to policymakers, practitioners and media outlets, to communicate my research and contribute to public and political debates	Me	Over 12 months ago	As a relatively unknown academic, it is hard to get access to these audiences, but once that connection is made there are a lot more opportunities, which also help to reinforce the quality of evidence for subsequent research.	The broader profile and work of UKICE opened up a big set of opportunities, plus my association with it meant that people were more likely to trust that I had something useful to offer to them. The

Respondent group	What was the thing UKICE did or produced?	What was the change?	Who did the change happen to?	When did the change occur?	In your view, why was this a significant change?	How specifically did UKICE facilitate or contribute to this change?
						UKICE office was also very good at passing on things to me individually.
Academic	Breadth of interest in Northern Ireland	Much more informed discussion about the consequences of Brexit for Northern Ireland. In particular, some of the human rights and equality questions that tend to be neglected.	Me	In last 2-3 years	Because there is a tendency to ignore or neglect the complexities of Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland.	A willingness to engage with questions around Northern Ireland that people tend to ignore. Others have now come to regret not engaging in the way that UKICE did. They were ahead of their time and did a great public service. They, for example, enabled detailed engagement by academics from Northern Ireland in the

Respondent group	What was the thing UKICE did or produced?	What was the change?	Who did the change happen to?	When did the change occur?	In your view, why was this a significant change?	How specifically did UKICE facilitate or contribute to this change?
						debates in London is a very welcoming and pro-active way.
Academic	Doing BBC experts case through Ben Miller	generated a huge amounts of interest in the project, in terms of getting people engaged with the research. That was a really, really important outcome	Me	Ongoing	It got me greater visibility. Establishing your credibility as a researcher on Brexit, that I think is the really biggest impact.	there's quite a lot of reputational sway of the UK change in Europe Even yesterday, journalists were contacting me about a piece that I put up there in June. So it's obviously become a place where people go to get information.

ANNEX 3: RESULTS OF ANALYSIS OF UKICE RESEARCH OUTPUTS

We reviewed the content and methods of 5 research outputs produced by UKICE to establish the scientific basis for the content. To this end, we assessed the content for its approach to data collection and analysis as well as, where relevant, Popay and colleagues’ 1998 criteria for evaluating qualitative data. The purpose of this exercise was to indicate to what extent research outputs published by UKICE have been able to maintain high scientific standards, and if not, how this was explained and framed.

As most outputs were not primary research, however, Popay et al.’s criteria had limited application. We therefore conducted an additional analysis of seven outputs provided to us by the UKICE team, against criteria developed by our team on the basis of UKICE’s goals: impartiality, breadth and depth of analysis, translation of evidence into advice, clarity of methodology and research standards.

Table 6: Analysis of UKICE research outputs, using Popay et al.’s criteria

Research output						
Title	The Changing Status of EU Nationals following Brexit (2021) Barnard C, Fraser Butlin S. and Costello F.	Values, volatility and voting: Understanding Voters in England 2015-2019 Surridge P.	Immigration and the UK economy After Brexit. (2021) Portes P.	Will the United Kingdom survive the UK internal market act (2021) Wetherill S.	Meritocracy and populism: is there a connection? (2021). Bukodi E. and Goldthorpe J.	Breaching the Blue Wall: could tactical voting help England’s progressive parties defeat the conservatives? (2021) Wager A., Chueng A. and Bale T.
Study type	Qualitative study	Secondary analysis of existing data	Secondary analysis of literature and commentary	Secondary analysis of literature and commentary	Secondary analysis of literature and commentary	Secondary analysis of literature and commentary
Popay and colleagues’ 1998 qualitative study quality criteria; Score 1-5 (1=lowest; 5=highest)						

Illuminates the subjective meaning, contexts and actions of those being investigated?	5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Show how behaviours are understood from within the culture, social setting or group being studied?	4	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Finds ways of giving lay knowledge equal worth to other forms of knowing?	4	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Studies how people act, employ knowledge and experience and understand the phenomenon of interest?	4	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Responsive to the social context and flexibility of design?	4	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Research design was flexible and the researchers responsive and adapted to the social circumstances of the study?	2	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
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Table 7: Analysis of UKICE research outputs, using bespoke evaluation criteria

Report	Impartiality	Breadth and depth of analysis	Translation of evidence into advice	Clarity of methodology and research standards
Brexit and Beyond (2021) (164 pages)	Analysis of topics is largely descriptive. Little information is provided on how issues were selected for discussion. Largely free of normative judgements.	Significant breadth, covering 72 topics under 7 themes. Brief overview of each, not in-depth analysis.	Little specific advice or recommendations provided, though occasional calls for issues to be considered or prioritised by politicians.	Methodology for answering key questions asked under each topic (where have we come from, where are we now and where are we heading?) is unstated.
Comfortable leavers: the expectations and hopes of the overlooked Brexit voters (2021) (12 pages)	Qualitative analysis is mostly descriptive and consistently evidenced through quotations.	Narrow focus on a particular group's expectations and hopes for Brexit. Coverage of a range of issues within this, in medium depth (with signposting to more in-depth analysis elsewhere).	Little specific advice provided, other than a call to increase understanding and acknowledgement of a group often overlooked in dominant narratives on Brexit.	Very briefly describes methodology. Signposts to further information on this available elsewhere.

Covid or Brexit? (2021) (11 pages)	Analysis is closely based on facts, with very little extrapolation or prognostication.	Broad coverage of eight relevant economic issues. Brief overview of each, not in-depth analysis.	No specific advice provided.	Original data sources and methodology for calculating quoted figures often not referenced. Data gaps and 'noise' are acknowledged.
Mind the values gap: The social and economic values of MPs, party members and voters (2020) (19 pages)	Quantitative analysis of survey results goes beyond descriptive analysis, to include some extrapolation and prognostication, but free of normative judgements.	Narrow focus on similarities and differences in social and economic values between MPs, party members and voters. In-depth analysis and discussion of survey results.	Some recommendations that politicians should take particular issues into consideration.	Very briefly describes analytical methodology. Signposts to descriptions of survey methodology.
No Deal Brexit: issues, impact, implications (2019) (36 pages)	Analysis includes descriptive analysis and (necessarily, given the topic) prognostication. Discussion of problems and challenges is largely free of normative judgements.	Broad coverage of various relevant issues, with a fairly brief overview of each topic (i.e. low to medium depth).	No specific advice provided.	Methodology is unstated.
Seven Brexit Endgame scenarios: a guide to the parliamentary process of withdrawal from the European Union (2019) (21 pages)	Sets out 'core facts' describing procedures that would occur under seven withdrawal scenarios. Includes some speculation (e.g. on potential problems), clearly marked as supposition.	Coverage of seven alternative withdrawal scenarios. Brief overview of each, covering key necessary processes.	No specific advice provided.	Methodology is unstated.
What would No Deal mean? (2020)	Analysis includes descriptive analysis and (necessarily,	Broad coverage of 21 topics under 8 themes.	No specific advice provided.	Methodology is unstated.

(66 pages)	given the topic) prognostication. Discussion of problems and challenges is largely free of normative judgements.	Some variation in depth of analysis, though usually fairly brief overview of each topic (i.e. low to medium depth).		
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ANNEX 4: RESULTS OF ANALYSIS OF 10 UKICE TWITTER INTERACTIONS

The table below sets out findings from analysis of UKICE Twitter interaction. Firstly, we tracked the distribution of 10 randomly-selected tweets³ made by UKICE, which covered a range of topics. We monitored the number of retweets and likes. We then conducted textual analysis of the Twitter accounts of those who re-tweeted the original posting. This was done to explore the professional characteristics and opinions of those who engage with UKICE’s tweets.

Table 8: Analysis of 10 UKICE Twitter interactions

Original tweet	Number of re-tweets	Followers of those re-tweeting	Characteristics of those ‘re-tweeting’						
			Pro Brexit	Anti Brexit	Brexit Neutral	Brexit Unknown	Academic	Media	Other commentator
@jamielow on the latest NI Life & Times (NILT) survey: ‘It’s particularly striking that the appetite for reform [of the Good Friday Agreement] isn’t confined to people from one particular community. Here	7	41207	0	3	3	1	4	3	0
@anandMenon1 and @hayward_katyspeak to host @jillongovtabout the NI Protocol, UK-EU relationship and what the Biden administration thinks of it all. Here	12	206765	0	8	2	1	9	0	3

³ A short posting made on the Twitter platform and visible mainly to followers of the poster’s account.

Great to see @Jaclarner from @CardiffPolitics interviewed on the @UKandEU blog as part of their #AcademicintheSpotlight series. Here	5	49260	0	0	4	1	4	0	1
The UK in a Changing Europe@UKandEUJun 16One week today will mark 5 years since the UK voted to leave the EU📢📅31@anandmenon1spins the Brexit WheelFwhich fellow will give you the lowdown on Brexit impacts in our NEW video📺WATCH in full here: https://youtube.com/watch?v=AZKiNN5b_f8#EURef5YrsOn Here	15	259589	1	8	5	3	9	0	8
The UK in a Changing Europe@UKandEUJun 'Just before the referendum, net migration had reached an all-time record.'What happened next? @jdporteslooks at immigration policy five years after Brexit 📍🗨️ Here	5	93096	0	2	3	0	5	0	0

What can we learn from the #CheshamAndAmersham and #Hartlepool by-elections? NEW blog by @p_surr ridge READ it here Right pointing backhand indexhttps://ukandeu.ac.uk/a-tale-of-two-by-elections/ Here	17	60871	0	13	3	1	6	1	9
The UK in a Changing Europe@UKandEUJun 19🔔 Earlier this week, we released a NEW report on the EU Settlement Scheme, which explains the scheme, its background, how it works, who has applied, who may not have and the lessons we have learned so far. READ it here Here	6	22091	0	5	0	1	2	0	4
'What if politics can be an exclusionary environment, in which it is difficult to fit in if you cannot signal that you possess certain types of cultural capital?' Here	2	10006	0	0	2	0	2	0	0
In-depth interviews with @joannaccherryand Dominic Grieve are the latest editions to our #BrexitWitnessArchive. So far, we have published 30 interviews with campaigners, politicians and officials that shaped the Brexit process. Here	37	353926	0	27	4	6	9	2	26

'The Brexit referendum had this ironic kind of result of on the one hand giving power to people, but actually strengthening the executive against the other kind of institutions that might normally hold it to account.' Here	14	52153	0	11	3	0	3	0	11
TOTALS	120	1148964	1	77	29	14	53	6	62

ANNEX 5: ORIGINALLY PROPOSED EVALUATION METHODS

Our approach to the evaluation

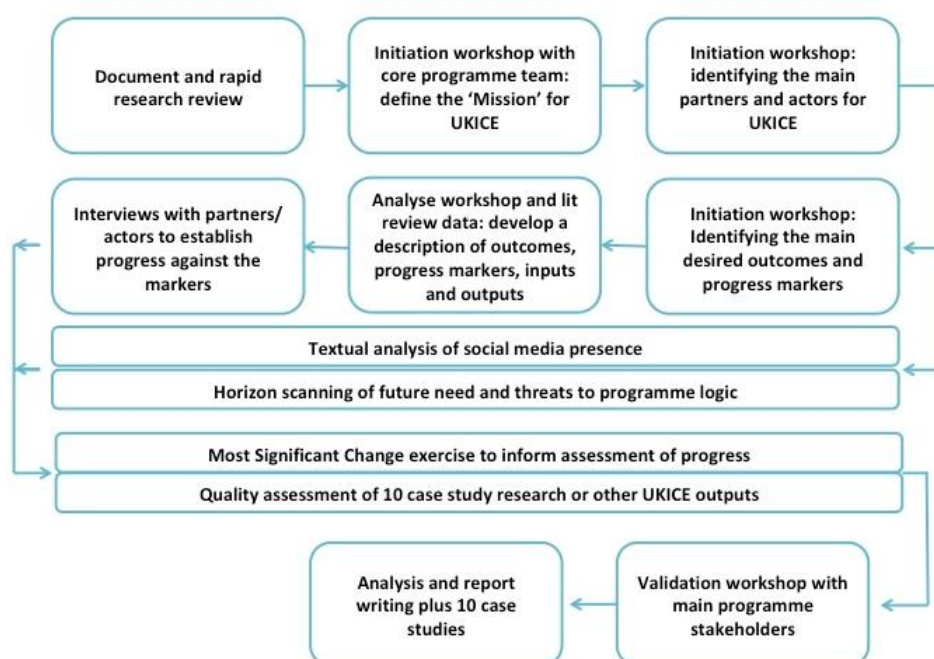
The desired aims of the evaluation, which include both an impact and process element, are threefold: to understand successful and less successful processes, to understand the impacts of UKICE and to describe if and how elements of the programme are transferable. The first two elements overlap – processes should be understood as successful or not in terms of how they helped to bring about desired (or desirable) impacts. The third component – transferability – will be understood in terms of which activities achieved the most impact and in which contexts and, therefore, which are worth transplanting or continuing.

Overall, our methodological approach befits the complexity of the programme – complex in that there are multiple, inter-related objectives and aims, which are likely to have evolved over time. To this end, we propose to use a grounded theory-based methodology which seeks to understand and register the organisational ambitions; observable impacts; the impacts considered to be the most significant by the organisation (and what this selection says about the organisation); and how the impacts relate to project activities, considering the macro and meso-level contexts. To meet these objectives, our methodology will use a version of Outcome Mapping, incorporating a Most Significant Change methodology. Outcome Mapping is widely used to assess impacts of complex programmes operating in changing environments and incorporates triangulation into the process. An advantage of Outcome Mapping for UKICE is that it evaluates impacts against evolving aims and objectives, and provides the programme leadership with a measure of what different stakeholders find most important.

Methods

Figure 1 below describes the proposed methods and the subsequent text sets out further detail for each element.

Figure 1. Methods in summary



Document and rapid research review

The purpose of this stage is twofold: to review programme literature to understand the programme's aims and objectives and then, to explore the current research literature on best practice in terms of these. This will help us to address the question '*what is the programme supposed to do?*' as well as '*was UKICE's format the best one for the job?*' A review of programme literature, such as project initiation documents or grant agreements, will provide us with initial understanding of UKICE's wider goals, and interim and immediate objectives. At the same time, we will conduct a rapid evidence review to explore the following questions: 1) what are the existing approaches to public knowledge dissemination on contested issues, that handle complexity? 2) What existing examples are there of knowledge dissemination that have worked well and that have similar challenges? What are the main pitfalls and enablers of disseminating complex, research-based information to the wider public? 3) What are the challenges and threats for maintaining credibility and perceptions of impartiality for research-based knowledge? Our methods for this review will follow Cochrane rapid review methods.⁴ This involves: Setting the research questions: we will consult with the project team to confirm, add to or refine the above questions, to ensure optimal relevance. Setting eligibility criteria for evidence: again in consultation, we will determine inclusion and exclusion criteria, prioritising (for example) higher quality, focused on the UK context but allowing inclusion of relevant international evidence. Evidence selected will be in English. Searching and screening: we will search databases of peer reviewed literature (e.g. DeepDyve and Web of Science) as well as search engines (e.g. Google and GoogleScholar), screening for relevance and eligibility before inclusion. Data extraction and assessment: data relevant to answering research questions will be extracted and recorded. Quality of evidence will be assessed (as low, medium or high). In addition we will seek access to Google Analytics data on UKICE's website traffic, to examine flow, page views, duration of views, as well as any internally captured monitoring data. This will allow us to gauge, at least, throughputs and some measure of reach.

The output from the review stage will be a draft description of the inputs, outputs, mechanisms and desired outcomes for UKICE and a series of additional outcomes that may also (have) result(ed) from the programme but were not necessarily envisaged at the time the programme was started. This document will be shared with the client to review and will be validated in the next stages.

Outcome workshop: mapping outcomes and main partners

The outcome workshop is very important for establishing the ambitions against which UKICE will be evaluated. Moreover, it is essential for ensuring the evaluation is useful for funders and project managers. We do not consider theories of change (or logic frameworks) to be static and our intention for the outcome workshop is not to draw out unintentional, obscured or unpredicted changes and desired changes, as well as intended ones. To do this, we will conduct an online-based (face to face if social distancing advice allows) workshop with between 5-8 senior level programme staff and also, possibly, funders. This will be organised in three sessions based on Outcome Mapping methodology. The first session will define the broad 'Mission' for the programme. Participants will be encouraged to be self-reflexive, and identify and challenge their own preconceptions and wired-in notions about the programme. This session will define the 'so what?' of UKICE's intention. At the session,

⁴ <https://methods.cochrane.org/rapidreviews/cochrane-rr-methods>

we will present the draft of our combined evidence and document review and pose a series of questions about the programme's Mission and goals. Here, we understand the Mission to be the long-term change, at the macro and meso levels, that the programme is working towards. 'Goals' are intermediate changes that drive towards the Mission. We will use a series of open-ended questions and challenges and encourage interaction between participants, including pushing tensions between respondent's notions, where they exist, to uncover commonly shared views and the 'non-negotiables' of UKICE's purpose. Session 2 will determine the groups and individuals that form UKICE's intended 'targets' (partners) – those for whom the programme intended changes and who were also involved in creating the changes. Once these groups are identified, they will form our interview sample (see next steps). Workshop participants will be asked to identify the main partner groups of interest. These may be individuals, organisations or groups of these. Participants will be challenged to think about what changes, in terms of the Mission and goals, were hoped for which groups of partners. Any deviation from the originally intended partners and related goals will be noted. Session 3 will begin to plot the intermediate progress markers, against which progress towards the Mission and goals will be measured. These will be determined for each partner group in order that progress may be verified during subsequent interviews with 'partner' respondents. Progress markers are, arguably, the most important items to flow from the workshop. They create the flesh on the bones of the high-level programme ambitions and serve to ground the evaluation in real world experience. To note, all sessions will encourage respondents to discuss and reflect on the empirical evidence about actually observed progress, partners, Mission and goals as well as theoretical projections about these.

Analysis of outcome workshop and review data

Very shortly following the workshop all data will be analysed, including findings from the literature and document review and the workshop transcripts, and developed into a comprehensive outcome map charting UKICE's Mission, goal, partners, progress markers, evidence relating to progress markers, potential confounders and unexpected potential impacts of the programme. This map will form the basis of the subsequent data collection, the purpose of which will be to validate the outcome map as well as augment it.

Interviews with partners to establish progress against the progress markers

This stage involves validating the Outcome Map through the collection of primary, qualitative data. We will interview 30-40 partners – those affected by and affecting UKICE – across the different partner groups. We imagine that the groups will include: 1) researchers and academics who provide data and analysis through the UKICE platform; 2) journalists who access and refer to UKICE data and opinion in their reporting; 3) political actors including MPs, MP candidates, political lobbying organisations of all colours and perspectives who access UKICE's opinion and data; 4) the general public users of social media accounts that refer to UKICE's opinion and data; 5) academic, management and communications staff at UKICE. However, these groups will not be defined until after the outcome workshop.

The interviews will be conducted in either individual, matched pair or triad groups, matched against others within the same organisation if applicable, otherwise one to one interviews will be used. Interviews will be loosely structured (semi-structured) and will gather opinions, insight and data on progress against the pre-defined progress markers, and insight into the contribution of UKICE's activities towards observed changes. The interviews will challenge

respondents to consider how things may have happened should UKICE not have been in place. This is useful to address the question of ‘what would business as usual look like in terms of the key outcomes of interest?’ The interviews will also probe into contiguous context relevant in complex environments, for example feedback loops and tipping points in term both of UKICE’s profile and its impact on the wider Brexit debate. Respondents will also be asked to comment on potential future information and knowledge needs relating to the post Brexit and future UK-EU relationship context. The interviews will be essential for addressing both perceptions of the impacts of UKICE but also the mechanisms for how these were brought about and the critical components for success, in particular, how perceptions of impartiality were maintained. Respondents will specifically be asked for their view on UKICE’s impartiality currently and historically. Respondents will continuously be asked to provide concrete examples of what they refer to. The interviews will be around 45 minutes in duration, recorded and transcribed. Transcripts will be thematically analysed using deductive and inductive codes. All responses will be triangulated with other interviews and by contrasting different respondent groups, with particular attention on potential conflict groups (e.g. political actors with different experiences and views).

Most Significant Change exercise

Part simultaneous with the interviews, interview respondents will be asked to participate in a separate exercise known as Most Significant Change. This is a useful means of understanding partners’ priorities, their experiences of the project and outcomes that were meaningful to them. Respondents will be emailed a template, which they will be asked to complete and return, detailing the Most Significant Change that they either experienced directly or witnessed in others as a result of UKICE’s work. The format encourages intuitive responding in that most people understand what is meant, for them, by ‘most significant’. The templates require that respondents describe the change in narrative form and provide details of why they think it is significant and to what extent they feel the programme contributed to the change. The completed and collected templates are then shared with a ‘selection group’, in this case, we recommend UKICE’s management team (those participating in the outcome workshop) be the ‘selection group’. The group is asked to select from the templates the most significant of these. The final number of the selection depends on the number of templates submitted. The reasons for the selection and the extent to which the programme was supposed to contribute to the changes recorded help evaluators and managers to learn about organisational priorities as well as identify significant changes.

Textual and network analysis of social media outputs

Simultaneous with the analysis of the outcome workshop and interviews, we will conduct an analysis of social media networks using UKICE’s media handles, posts, links, hash tags or other relevant markers. The objective here is to trace for how far UKICE’s outputs have been shared as well as the extent to which messages flowing from UKICE have been altered or otherwise. To this end we will use Twitter to track 7 original posts and use data scraping software to monitor how far the original posts have been shared and across how many different accounts including how many followers each sharing account has, to provide an indication of the potential spread of information. The preceding interviews will help to identify any relevant posts that respondents recall. We will examine a sample of each post’s re-tweeting at several intervals (depending on how many times it is shared) but including towards the time of the posts’ origination, towards the last time it was shared and at some point mid way between these two. We will examine the context in which each post was shared at these various time points to identify the type of user accounts that make up these

contexts (for example, organisations, individuals) as well as messaging that surrounds the tweets including comments. We will analyse contextual comments to address the questions: *'are readers supportive or otherwise? Are readers trusting of the content or critical? Are sharers and others interacting with the posts from a range of political convictions and opinion on Brexit?'* We will conduct a separate data scraping exercise to identify commentary on the extent to which UKICE is considered impartial and trustworthy. For this we will use a scraping bot to search terms relating to impartiality, bias, prejudice, trustworthiness and related colloquialisms. Opcit Research has used similar techniques, for example, to monitor social media accounts of MEPs and MEP candidates in our recent study on Women's political strategies for election, for the European Parliament.

Horizon scanning of future need and threats to UKICE's logic model

Simultaneous with the social media data scraping, we will conduct a horizon scanning exercise to address the question, *'Can UKICE continue to be fit for purpose in its current form and what, if any, challenges must it prepare for?'* This will be done using similar methods to the literature review but will be directed at specific future challenges and foresight literature including technological, UK-relevant political and socio-cultural studies, including research into changing information needs and demography (notably ageing and changes in educational qualifications) and the post Covid context. Crucially, the changing needs of Brexit, post-Brexit and continuing UK-EU relationship and potential future needs will be addressed. To this end, databases of peer reviewed literature will be searched using pre-defined quality criteria and search terms which will be agreed with the client beforehand. Data will be analysed thematically and triangulated with data from the interviews and outcome workshop. This process will identify potential challenges and the capacity for UKICE to respond. This stage will be important for developing recommendations for the programme going forward.

Case studies of UKICE outputs and their use

We will develop case studies of the quality and use of 7 of UKICE's outputs including studies and reports, briefings and opinion. The purpose is two-fold: 1) to assess if and how the outputs can be demonstrably objective based on credible science and if any are exposed to criticism of being partial. We will develop a framework for making the assessment based on existing and well-regarded measures of scientific impartiality and robustness. This includes, for example the Maryland Scientific Methods scale for evaluative or impact studies, Popay and colleagues' standards for analysing qualitative data and, for reviews and mini reviews, Cochrane collaboration processes. We will apply a structured assessment using relevant criteria from the different measures and validate the assessment between 2 researchers. 2) We will develop narrative 'case studies' of how the outputs were used, based on interview data and describe respondents' views on the voracity and usefulness of the outputs. The case studies will provide insight into any tensions and synchronicities between the end-users' needs for the outputs, users' perceptions of their voracity and how, ultimately, the outputs were used. We are particularly interested in whether users' views of voracity, tally with the quality assessment.

Analysis of data and final validation workshop

All data will be analysed using thematic analyses and inductive and deductive coding, to develop a draft Outcome Map and final report. These outputs will be shared with the client and participants of the outcome workshop who will be asked to join a final validation

workshop to discuss the findings. The draft analysis will contain data and address questions such as: *'What is the most current and relevant Mission statement for UKICE in terms of what UKICE is doing and what it wants to do? What are the main indicators for success in the interim and longer terms and what does evidence say about progress towards these? What are the organisations' priorities and values in terms of the changes it has brought and seeks to bring about? Who are the most important stakeholders and partners for the Programme? What is the perception of UKICE in terms of impartiality and quality amongst both the general public and professional opinion formers? What is the quality of output in terms of impartiality and scientific credibility? What are the challenges and opportunities for UKICE in the future?'*

The validation workshop will be used to run through the findings and allow respondents to challenge, accept or refine them based on evidenced opinion. Where a challenge is made with insufficient evidence, we will make recommendations on how to gather more evidence. Importantly, the validation workshop is a space for processing the findings and engaging in honest dialogue about future planning, including the important question of *'should the UKICE programme continue, if so in what form?'*

Final report and deliverables

Following the validation workshop, data will be used to compile an easy to read, theoretically informed final report that addresses the question of the impact and processes that support impact of UKICE. The report will address the questions listed in the section above and will provide clear recommendations about the need for UKICE or something similar. Recommendations and findings will be strengthened by reference to up to date literature on knowledge creation and dissemination, the use of data within modern democracies and the technological and social challenges related to this, with reference at all times to Brexit debates. However, a key theme for analysis is likely to include how Brexit, post Brexit and UK-EU relationship issues are likely to present information challenges in the future. To this end, our horizon scanning exercise will draw out relevant findings. In addition to policy-focused recommendations, the final report will draw out findings on the robustness and quality of UKICE's outputs as well as how these were used in real world settings. The report will include an Executive Summary. A briefing note may also be prepared.

Recruitment of respondents and risk management

Participants in the outcome and validation workshops are likely to be employees or those closely invested in UKICE. In this sense, the projected sample of 5-8 senior level participants will be recruited from UKICE's staff and, potentially, funders. These will have a professional interest in participation and, therefore, risk of refusal is low. To manage risks of non-participation in this element, we will ensure buy-in to the evaluation from senior management through the robustness of our proposed methodology as well as our policy of frequent and honest communication. All potential participants will be provided information about the purpose of the evaluation and assured that it is a learning process, rather than an assessment of their organisation's efficacy. We intend to recruit 30-40 participants in interviews and the Most Significant Change (MSC) exercise. MSC will be a follow-up online exercise. Some participants will be staff members or associates with a professional attachment and a low risk of non-participation. Others, however, such as journalists or politicians have higher risks of non-participation. Mitigation is achieved through our sampling strategy being both opportunistic and purposive. We will establish as large a

sampling frame as possible by leveraging UKICE's contact list, details of platform users and contacts. The sample frame will be organised by profession, rather than, for example, age or gender – characteristics that lead to restrictive parameters for statistical matching. This means, should an invitee refuse, we will have a broad sample frame to find a replacement. For the higher-risk respondent groups, we will work with the client to use any existing good will or contact to approach the participant. It may be necessary for the client to send an introductory email prior to our recruitment process. However, our most important mitigation strategy is to provide clear information about the relevance of the research and the confidential nature of participation and, centrally, the large sampling frame of end users. We have successfully recruited MPs, political party respondents and journalists for our other research projects in this way.