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Designing the UK's Good Practice Exchange for research culture

Supplementary information

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Annex A. Methodology

A.1. Overview of methodological approach

Each phase of the project focuses on different elements of model design, e.g. desired outcomes, activities, resources and evaluation requirements. To ensure that all elements are co-designed with comprehensive Research and Innovation (R&I) stakeholders, we implemented a variety of methods that draw on learnings from existing research culture and good-practice exchange (GPEx) initiatives.

We conducted multiple rounds of desk research to build a targeted review of other GPEx programmes, existing research culture activities and a detailed mapping of the financial resources required. Interviews, focus groups, and a sector-wide consultation survey have provided different pathways through which R&I stakeholders have informed the design of GPEx, suited to their needs and priorities. We placed particular emphasis on meaningful engagement, facilitating stakeholder participation across sectors, regions and social groups. All stakeholder engagement and data collection activities were reviewed and approved by RAND Europe's Research Ethics Committee.

To facilitate targeted dissemination of engagement activities with underrepresented stakeholder groups, we conducted a detailed mapping exercise in Phase 1, drawing on the project team's professional networks, wider R&I sector organisations and contacts from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). We mapped more than 200 stakeholders and assigned them to one of five categories based on their organisational affiliation:

1. Stakeholders from **academic organisations,** including researchers based at higher education institutions (HEIs), research managers, representative bodies and staff networks.
2. Stakeholders from UK-based **funding organisations** that support R&I activities across England and all devolved nations, and are either in the public sector or operate as charitable funders and foundations.
3. Stakeholders from **private sector industries**, including large R&I businesses, trade unions and Human Resources (HR) managers.
4. Stakeholders from **connector** organisations that are key conveners of R&I activities in the sector. Examples include learned societies, policy and public engagement organisations and institutes for knowledge exchange.
5. Stakeholders from **wider research environments**, i.e. research-conducting institutions not covered in previous categories. Examples include public sector research enterprises, the National Health Service (NHS), community-based research organisations, museums and heritage organisations.

We selected stakeholders from the mapped longlist for data collection activities in Phase 1 based on their engagement in the R&I sector, interest in contributing to the design of GPEx and their organisation's role as leading convenors of R&I activities in the UK. In Phase 2, we adopted wider engagement mechanisms, including social media outreach, existing associations and sector events to invite new stakeholders to the consultation process (e.g. conferences). Table 1 below summarises all stakeholder engagement activities conducted and details the stakeholder types engaged in each phase.

Table 1. Total stakeholders engaged by phase and method

Phase	Method	Number of stakeholders	Stakeholder types:
Phase 1	Interviews	N = 7	• 5 stakeholders from academic organisations • 2 stakeholders from connector organisations
	Vision focus groups	N = 49	• 19 stakeholders from academic organisations • 8 stakeholders from funding organisations • 4 stakeholders from industries • 9 stakeholders from connector organisations • 9 stakeholders from wider research environments
Phase 2	Consultation survey	N = 179	• 126 stakeholders from academic organisations • 21 stakeholders from non-profit organisations and charity/community organisations • 20 stakeholders from public sector research organisations, local or national governments and other organisations • 13 organisations from the private sector organisations • 2 stakeholders from the health and social care trust or the health service[1]
	Implementation focus groups	N = 48	• 18 stakeholders from academic organisations • 12 stakeholders from connector organisations • 8 stakeholders from funding organisations • 6 stakeholders from wider research environments • 4 stakeholders from private-sector organisations
	Project workshop	N = 43	• Project workshop conducted at the International Research Culture Conference 2025 in Warwick[2]
Phase 3	Resource interviews	N = 4	• 2 stakeholders from connector organisations • 1 stakeholder from academia • 1 stakeholder from wider research environments

[1] The number of stakeholders by type exceeds 179, as respondents could select more than one group.

[2] Participation data is based on the number of registrations received for the workshop and lacks disaggregation by stakeholder type.

The final delivery model proposed for GPEx in the accompanying main report considers the findings from all stakeholder engagement activities. The ToC developed represents the outcome of this synthesis process, conducted through discussion of the agreement matrix with UKRI and an internal project team workshop. Similarly, the development of evaluation requirements for GPEx was informed by insights from Phase 1 desk research, which recognised the emphasis on feedback loops, mutual learning and shared ownership among its members. Overall, this approach has led to a co-created delivery model for GPEx that aims to fulfil the community's expectations, outlining where it adds value and the conditions under which its contributions to research culture change and wider R&I activities are possible.

A.2. Desk research

A variety of research methods and stakeholder engagement strategies have underpinned the design of potential delivery models for GPEx. Given the study's iterative approach, findings from each data collection exercise have informed the design of subsequent activities. This annex and its subsequent sections describe the methodological steps implemented.

A.2.1. Desk research of expected outcomes and impacts

We conducted multiple rounds of desk research to build a targeted review of different GPEx functions. This process was crucial to ensure that the proposed delivery model learns from similar initiatives (focused on research culture or with similar objectives) and builds on existing gaps to add value. We used desk research in Phase 1 to understand how existing GPEx programmes are designed, delivered and experienced. It focused on factors influencing the effectiveness of these initiatives, the outcomes within their scope, and how stakeholders interpret their value (see Box 1).

Box 1. Key questions for Phase 1 desk research

Key questions:

- Research Question 1: What evidence exists regarding the impacts and outcomes of good practice exchange programmes?
- Research Question 2: What factors or features have been identified as critical to their success and effectiveness?
- Research Question 3: What value do different stakeholder groups - such as universities, funders, professional bodies, businesses or communities - attribute to such programmes?
- Research Question 4: What are the commonly identified strengths and limitations of GPEx approaches?

We identified peer-reviewed articles through database searches in Scopus and Web of Science, targeting English-language articles published from 2015 to 2025 using titles, abstracts, topics and keywords. We designed search strings to cover a range of broad and specific concepts relevant to knowledge sharing and peer learning, along with Boolean operators and UK/US spelling variants. Reviewed grey literature included policy reports, evaluations and think-tank outputs, identified using targeted searches (e.g. 'evaluation of peer learning network'), open repositories and references from case studies by key organisations such as the

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (Nesta), the Cabinet Office and UKRI.

We used the following search terms in structured database searches to identify relevant academic literature:

1. 'Good' and 'practice' and 'exchange'
2. 'Knowledge' and 'exchange'
3. 'Knowledge' and 'sharing'
4. 'Practice' and 'sharing'
5. 'Peer' and 'learning'
6. 'Communities' and 'of' and 'practice'
7. 'Collaborative' and 'learning'
8. 'Institutional' and 'learning'
9. 'Organisational' and 'learning'
10. 'Learning' and 'networks'
11. 'Knowledge' and 'mobilisation/mobilization' (UK and US spelling)
12. 'Cross' and 'sector' and 'learning'
13. 'Evidence' and 'informed' and 'practice'
14. 'Organisational' and 'change'
15. 'Good practice exchange'.

Based on these terms, we used the following search strings:

- ("Good Practice Exchange" OR "knowledge exchange" OR "knowledge transfer") AND (impact* OR outcome* OR effect* OR benefit* OR result* OR "evidence of impact") AND ("higher education" OR university OR academia OR "research culture").
- ("Good Practice Exchange" OR "knowledge exchange" OR "practice sharing") AND ("success factor*" OR enabler* OR barrier* OR "critical factor*" OR determinant* OR design OR implementation) AND ("programme effectiveness" OR "organisational learning" OR "collaborative learning").
- ("Good Practice Exchange" OR "knowledge exchange" OR "collaborative programme*") AND ("stakeholder perspective*" OR "university view*" OR "funder perception*" OR "employer view*" OR "professional bodies" OR business OR industry) AND (value OR benefit* OR usefulness OR relevance OR motivation).
- ("Good Practice Exchange" OR "knowledge exchange programme*" OR "peer learning initiative*") AND (strength* OR limitation* OR weakness* OR challenge* OR drawback* OR "critical review" OR "critical assessment") AND (evaluation OR effectiveness OR impact OR sustainability OR inclusivity).

We prioritised studies that addressed structured knowledge exchange, organisational learning or collaborative improvement in public and research contexts, and shortlisted articles for full review if they addressed programme design, implementation or the impact of GPEx initiatives.

We adopted an inductive, thematic approach to explore what makes GPEx work, for whom, and in what contexts, paying particular attention to the roles of infrastructure, facilitation, leadership and trust –

especially in research culture settings. Thus, we used a narrative synthesis to identify recurring themes, enabling factors and outcome patterns across four areas:

- Implementation and adaptation of GPEx models
- Enablers and barriers to success
- Observed outcomes and impacts
- Inclusion, learning and collaboration.

Findings from this exercise were used to identify core principles for developing a GPEx model and informed subsequent stakeholder engagement activities, including Phase 1 interviews and focus groups.

A.2.2. Comparative analysis of practice exchange initiatives

We conducted a second round of desk research in June 2025 to identify activities that can help achieve the desired GPEx outcomes and impacts. We selected existing initiatives for comparison based on their objectives or impact areas (networking, capacity-building or evaluation). This process led to a review of activities implemented by the What Works Network, the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), Local Policy Innovation Partnerships, Westminster Working Cultures and international models such as European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) Actions and the Open Science Monitoring Initiative. For these organisations, we assessed publicly available resources to explore adaptable approaches to peer learning, an emphasis on relational infrastructure and active participation, and their potential to support cultural or system change across complex institutional settings, which could inform the design of GPEx.

A.2.3. Review of financial evidence

We conducted the third round of desk research to understand how existing practice exchange programmes operationalise their activities through governance, decision making and costing processes. We selected organisations for review based on the extent to which they implement activities shortlisted for GPEx. These included the What Works Network, NCCPE, Science Europe, Local Policy Innovation Partnerships, COST, Open Science Monitoring Initiative, UK Evaluation Society, N8, the European Evaluation Society and the Early Career Researcher Network. Financial statements and annual account summaries published and/or submitted to Companies House[3] by these organisations were part of the review. We extracted qualitative information about governance structures and cost categories, and quantitative spending figures, to create benchmarks for costing parameters (e.g. overheads).

[3] Companies House is an executive agency of the Department for Business and Trade that holds the UK's register of companies and the Register of Overseas Entities.

A.3. Interviews

The project combined desk research with two rounds of interviews to learn more about the practical and operational experiences of implementing a practice exchange initiative within and beyond the field of research culture.

A.3.1. Scoping interviews

We conducted seven semi-structured interviews in Phase 1 to learn firsthand about the experiences of key organisations active in the UK research culture field. We chose a scoping interview format for its ability to capture high-level and sector-wide views rather than individual perspectives. We designed an interview guide to collect evidence from convenors of existing research culture initiatives regarding outcomes, unexpected results, enabling conditions and additional reflections. RAND Europe's Research Ethics Committee approved the interview guide, invitation and consent forms in April 2025.

We drew the interviewee sample from organisations actively involved in research culture reform that have the potential to shape, inform or amplify the R&I sector's future engagement with GPEx. The diversity of regional, demographic and cross-sector perspectives was another key consideration in determining the sample selection. As a result, seven interview invites were issued to and accepted by representatives from the All-Island Research Culture Network, Black Researchers Consortium, Research Culture Enablers Network, Welsh Innovation Network, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Caucus (EDICa), and NCCPE.

We conducted all interviews online, and each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. Interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically to highlight major perspectives on GPEx programmes, their possible outcomes and any competing tensions or priorities to consider early in the design process. We anonymised personal data from all interview transcripts in line with RAND Europe's and the General Data Protection Regulation's guidelines.

Box 2. Phase 1 interview themes

Interview themes in Phase 1:

- Interviewees' experience of research culture improvement initiatives, including any involvement in peer learning or practice-sharing approaches.
- Desired outcomes and underpinning values associated with research culture change.
- Key enablers and barriers to cross-sector or system-level culture-change.
- Initial reactions to the concept of a GPEx model, and ideas for its potential scope or design.

We consolidated findings from desk research and interviews to develop a list of 36 potential outcomes for the three objectives: building networks, supporting evaluations, and strengthening leadership.

A.3.2. Resource interviews

In phase 3, we conducted interviews with four financial experts to understand and develop the core costs profile for GPEx. We conducted all interviews online, and each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. Interviews were conducted using the cost template developed for this project, and key themes and discussion

prompts were shared with the experts before the interviews to support evidence gathering. During the interviews, we asked experts to estimate the approximate levels of resources required for implementing a list of GPEx activities. Interviewees calculated estimates of costs per unit, i.e. providing granular staff, non-staff and grant costs incurred for each activity, based on their experience.

In addition to quantitative information, we asked interviewees about key enablers and barriers to delivery and the logic underpinning their distribution of resources between programme management, core activities, grants and overheads.

Box 3. Phase 3 interview themes

Interview themes:

- Overview of staff roles and activities relevant to GPEx
- Annual salaries and Full-Time Equivalent (FTEs) of staff roles
- Allocation of staff, non-staff and grant costs for each unit of activity
- Overhead costs such as rent and utilities, IT support and audits
- Allocation of resources between research, administration, networking and grants
- Key enablers and barriers to improving the efficient delivery of GPEx.

A.4. Focus groups

Focus groups are one of the central engagement mechanisms this study employed to engage with wider R&I stakeholders, invite in-depth external perspectives and validate any insights derived from desk research. We used focus groups to understand areas of agreement/disagreement among stakeholder groups and to promote discussion among them. In Phase 1, these took the form of 'vision' focus groups, i.e. stakeholders' visions for GPEx and the outcomes and impacts they expected from it. In Phase 2, the vision focus group participants reconvened along with new R&I stakeholders to take part in Implementation focus groups, i.e. activity models that could help achieve the shortlisted outcomes.

A.4.1. Vision focus groups

We compiled an extensive longlist of potential participants by leveraging professional networks within the consortium, drawing on UKRI inputs and considering representation across organisation types and UK nations. As part of this mapping exercise, we assigned stakeholders to one of five types based on their organisational affiliation: academia, industry, funders, connectors and wider research environments, to ensure representation across R&I stakeholders. Table 2 below provides additional information on the stakeholder mapping exercise and the focus group participants.

Table 2. Stakeholders engaged in the vision focus group

Stakeholder type	Number of stakeholders included in mapping exercise (N = 116)	Number of stakeholders attending vision focus groups (N = 49)
Academia	N = 37	N = 19
Funders	N = 20	N = 8
Industry	N = 13	N = 4
Connectors	N = 30	N = 9
Wider research environments	N = 16	N = 9

Given the number of focus groups and the maximum participants required for each, we identified and issued invites to 79 stakeholders, focusing on 1) maintaining equitable representation from across the devolved nations, 2) inviting no more than one stakeholder per organisation, and 3) facilitating a balance of perspectives across sectors and geography. We provided stakeholders with participant information sheets and consent forms that were reviewed and approved by RAND Europe's Research Ethics Committee in April 2025. In total, 49 stakeholders accepted the invitation.

We randomly assigned participants to one of eight focus group sessions, depending on their availability and three additional parameters. First, we limited the maximum number of stakeholders per slot to eight to ensure that all participants had sufficient opportunities to share their views and contribute to the discussion. Where possible, we randomly allocated participants to a slot only if that slot had no more than two participants from the same organisation type. Similarly, where possible, we shuffled participants between slots to facilitate gender balance and a spread of stakeholders across the devolved nations.

We conducted eight focus groups online in June 2025, with each slot including six to seven participants and lasting approximately 90 minutes. A project briefing was sent to participants one week before the focus group, providing more information about the GPEx project and a longlist of 36 outcomes. During the focus groups, we asked participants to share their experiences from existing GPEx initiatives, followed by a ranking exercise using online Miro boards to rank the longlist of 36 outcomes as most 'valuable', 'urgent' and 'feasible'. We recorded all focus groups for transcription purposes, anonymised them, and stored them in line with RAND Europe's and the General Data Protection Regulation's guidelines.

A.4.2. Implementation focus groups

We used a similar methodological approach (in terms of participant selection, focus group duration, and delivery) for the implementation focus groups as for the vision focus groups. For the second round, we conducted eight focus groups in September 2025, bringing together participants returning from Phase 1 and new stakeholders from the UK's R&I community who took part in the consultation survey. Table 3 below summarises the key stakeholder types engaged through the 'implementation' focus groups.

Table 3. Stakeholders engaged in the implementation focus groups

Stakeholder type	Number of participants from vision focus groups (N = 26)	Number of new stakeholders taking part (N = 22)	Total number of participants (N = 48)
Academia	N = 9	N = 9	N = 18
Funders	N = 6	N = 2	N = 8
Industry	N = 0	N = 4	N = 4
Connectors	N = 7	N = 5	N = 12
Wider research environments	N = 4	N = 2	N = 6

Focus group participants discussed three activity models that illustrated the activities selected by survey respondents and were supplemented with additional details on operational features, governance, and ownership. The models proposed in the focus group were provocatively designed to prompt reactions from participants. The three models discussed in the focus groups are shown in Figures 1–3.

Figure 1. Evidence and standards centre

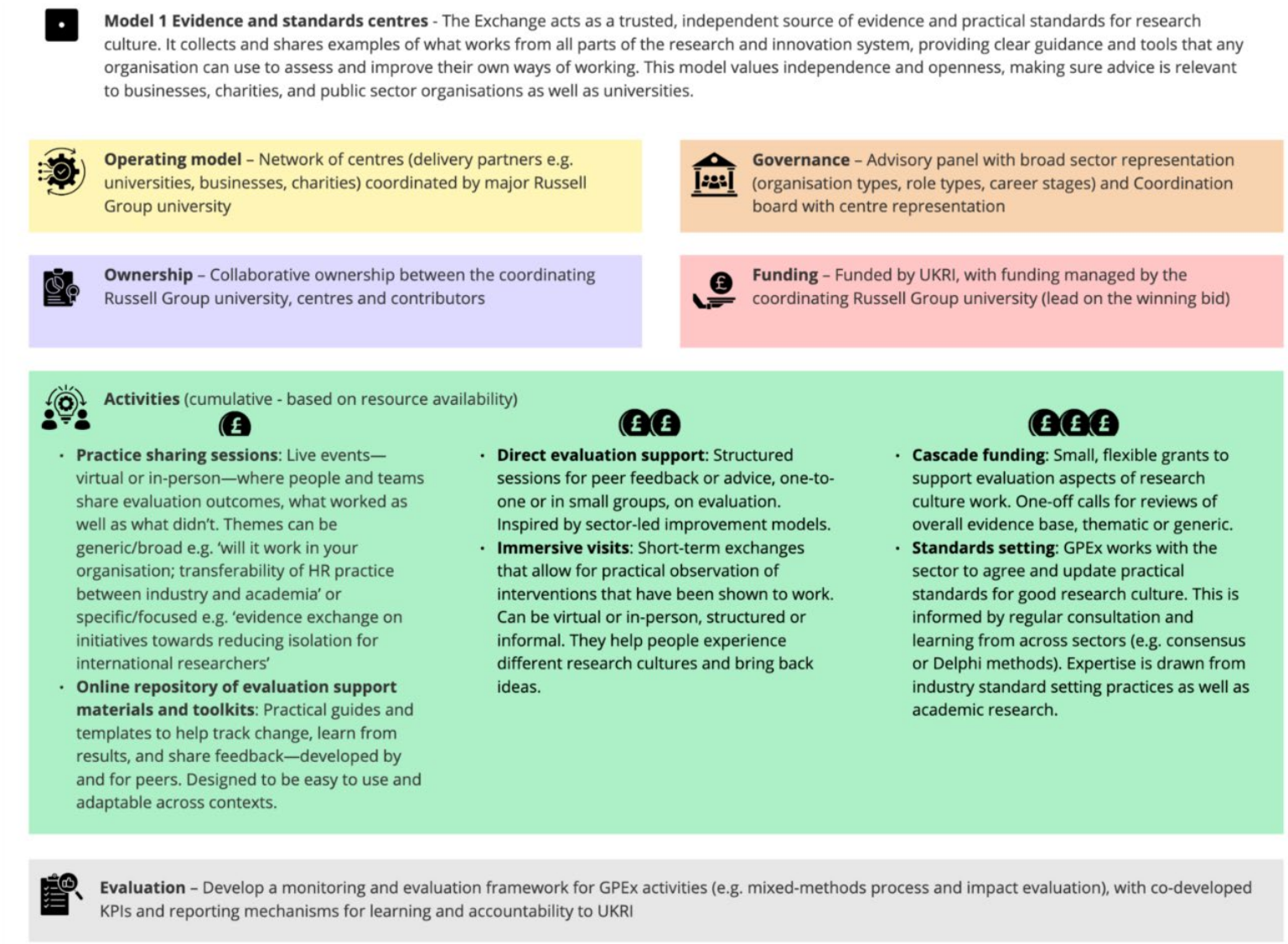


Figure 2. Peer learning and convening networks

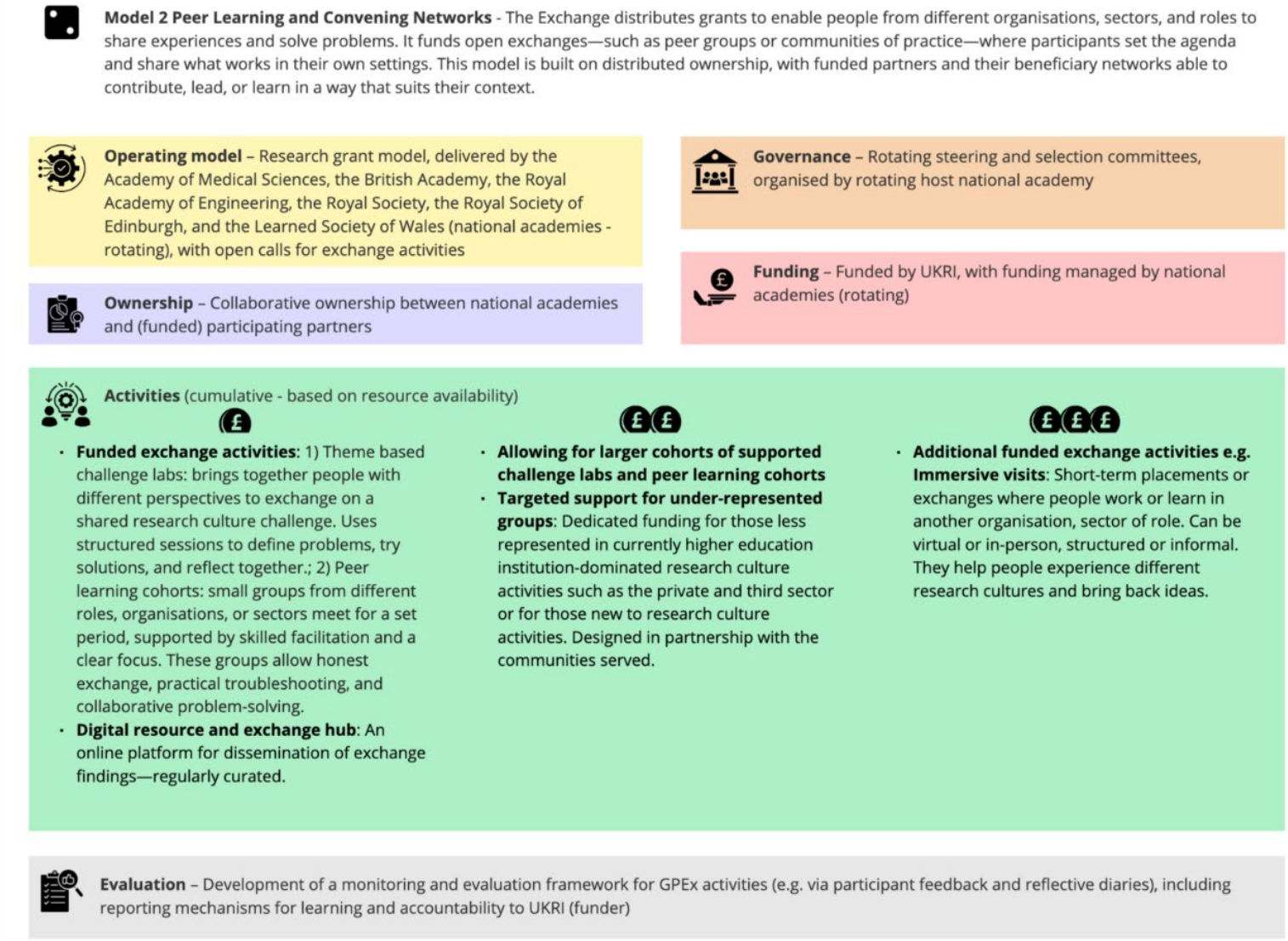
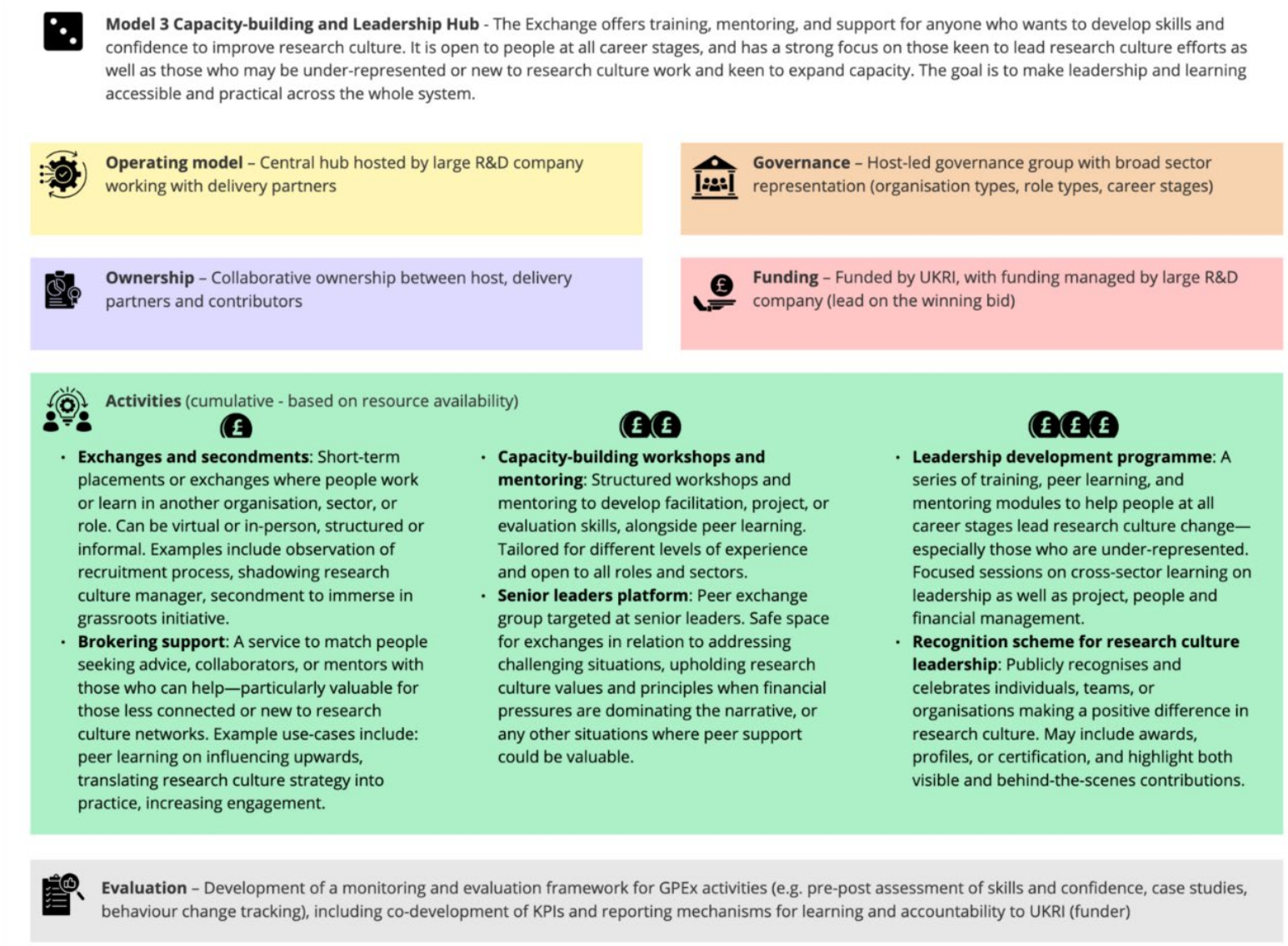


Figure 3. Capacity-building and leadership hub



A.5. Consultation survey

We conducted a consultation exercise between June and August 2025 via an online survey to maximise the number of stakeholders consulted in the design of GPEx. Building on the consultation paper developed through desk research, we invited responses from the wider R&I community to assess the perceived relevance and prioritisation of the five activity models. We designed the questionnaire[4] using a combination of closed and open-ended questions to address five key themes related to the proposed GPEx activities (see Box 7).

Box 4. Themes covered in the survey questionnaire

The survey protocol used a combination of ranking, multiple-choice and open-text questions to understand the views of diverse R&I stakeholders regarding:

- Which GPEx objective (networking, evaluation or leadership) is the most significant.
- The proposed activity models that add the most value relative to existing research culture initiatives.
- The likelihood of their participation in GPEx with the proposed activity models.
- The factors influencing their appetite to engage in GPEx and the proposed activity models.
- Additional activities or factors not covered in the survey worth considering.

We conducted the consultation using SmartSurvey,[5] following an internal pilot of the platform to assess technical coherence, question structure, respondent burden and user experience. We launched the survey on 3 July 2025 and invited responses until 10 August 2025. All R&I stakeholders based in the UK and international experts with a view on the UK ecosystem were eligible to fill out the survey. Questions at the start of the survey confirmed participant consent and eligibility to participate in the consultation. Respondents interested in further engaging with the design of GPEx were requested to share their details at the end of the survey.

We analysed the survey data at the mid-point mark to address any demographic underrepresentation through targeted communication activities. Based on the interim results, we sent tailored invites to additional stakeholders in Wales and Northern Ireland to improve representation across devolved nations. We also conducted additional outreach activities on professional platforms and in networks to engage with industry and representatives from charitable and non-profit organisations.

In total, we received 184 responses, exceeding our expected range of 75–100 responses. We removed five incomplete responses as the respondents did not meet the eligibility criteria.[6] Thus, we received 179 eligible survey responses from R&I stakeholders in the UK and internationally. Of these, 55 respondents provided open-text responses, and 98 respondents expressed interest in participating in a follow-up focus group.

[4] Survey questionnaire can be previewed at: https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/preview/GPExConsultation/802395A539456E0AD61610BED7545F (as of 13 March 2026).

[5] SmartSurvey is an online platform for designing and hosting web-based surveys.

[6] One incomplete response was removed because the respondent did not provide consent to take part in the survey. Four incomplete responses were removed because the respondents self-selected 'No' when asked whether they were a member of the UK R&I community or an international stakeholder with a view on UK research culture.

Surveyed respondents (N = 179) captured a good balance of perspectives from the devolved nations and different types of organisations, as seen in Figure 1 and Table 4.

Figure 4. Consultation survey respondents by region

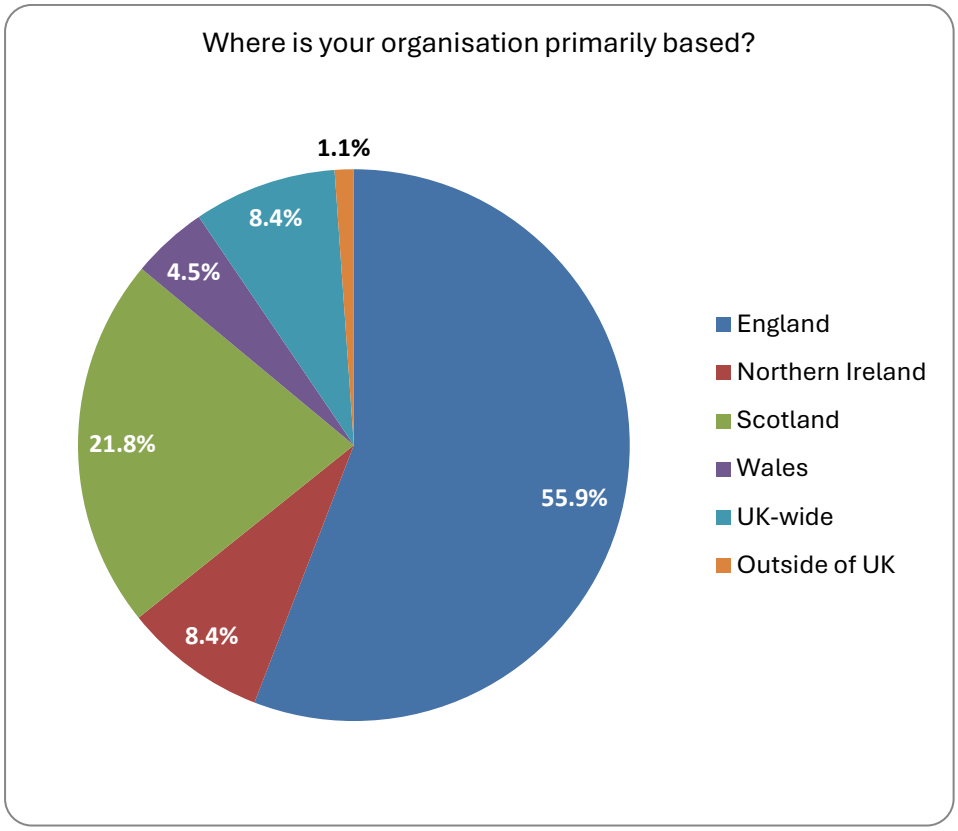


Table 4. Distribution of consultation survey respondents by sector

Sector	Percentage of the sample	Response Total (N = 179)
Small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) – 0-249 employees	5.0%	9
Large firm (UK or international) – 250+ employees	2.2%	4
Higher education institution (e.g. university)	70.4%	126
Public sector research organisation (e.g. public research institute, public sector research establishment)	8.4%	15
Health and social care trust and/or health service	1.1%	2
Local or national government	1.1%	2
Other public sector organisation	1.7%	3
Non-profit organisation, charity or community organisation	11.7%	21
Freelance or independent consultant	0.6%	1
Other (please specify):	5.0%	9

We analysed quantitative responses to produce descriptive statistics, and employed Borda counts to analyse ranks assigned to the proposed models. Trends in stakeholders' opinions of the models and influencing factors were disaggregated by region and organisation type to test for any variation among stakeholder groups. Open-text responses were thematically coded and analysed using an inductive approach to uncover additional enablers, barriers and external conditions reported to affect GPEx's activities.

A.6. Strengths and limitations of the approach

Stakeholder input and co-design are critical for the design of an effective GPEx. The project has created different pathways through which stakeholders have been able to decide the nature and extent of their involvement in the design process. This is also evident in the number of stakeholders re-engaging with the process (e.g. participants from vision focus groups returning to implementation focus groups) as well as in new stakeholders joining the consultation in Phase 2. The project's iterative structure has also enabled consensus-building among participants and crucial feedback loops, whereby outputs from one phase/method are tested in subsequent activities. Through targeted dissemination strategies, the project has also facilitated the participation of stakeholders outside academic institutions, such as non-profit organisations, small- and medium-sized R&I industries, and public sector research enterprises.

However, one key limitation of the activities is the limited (but not absent) participation from private-sector organisations. Insights from private-sector stakeholders in focus groups revealed stark differences in research environments and priorities that may be challenging to align with the needs of researchers from UK universities. The delivery model proposed in the final report addresses these concerns with additional information and suggestions.

In addition, the desk research underpinning our understanding of existing research culture initiatives and GPEx programmes provided limited evidence on long-term impacts, since existing evaluations have predominantly focused on short-term outputs rather than long-term behavioural or cultural change. Similarly, the transferability of insights from GPEx programmes in health, education, local government and civic design was limited, affecting their applicability across different environments. Recognising this challenge, we increased efforts in Phase 2 to expand the range of stakeholder types and sectors participating in the consultation process.

Annex B. Findings on the desired outcomes and impacts of GPEx

The first phase of the project set out to identify the expected outcomes and impacts of a GPEx in research culture, based on desk research and stakeholder engagement through interviews and vision focus groups.

A review of existing GPEx approaches revealed that their effectiveness depends on strong stakeholder engagement, institutional readiness and evaluation methods that go beyond basic metrics. These factors are particularly important in the context of GPEx, as systemic cultural change in R&I ecosystems can often be complex and contested. Our synthesised findings from the desk research and subsequent interviews identified a longlist of 36 outcomes, which we then tested in vision focus groups with a mix of stakeholders across the R&I system.

Phase 1 highlighted five core principles for the development of a GPEx model:

1. **Facilitation-first approach:** Trusted facilitation and relational leadership are central to an effective GPEx. Delivery should prioritise facilitation capacity – locally and nationally – over static content or tools.
2. **Flexible participation pathways:** Not all actors will engage in the same way. Providing multiple entry points from informal peer exchange to structured learning cohorts can broaden access while maintaining coherence.
3. **Integrated evaluation**: Evaluation should be developmental and participatory, focused on learning rather than compliance. Tracking equity, voice and influence will be key – especially for understanding cultural change over time.
4. **Structural equity:** Equity should be built into GPEx's design and governance, not just stated as a goal. Consider mechanisms such as co-design panels, shared leadership and equity audits to embed this principle in practice.
5. **Strategic alignment:** The model should connect with existing research culture initiatives, funding streams and networks. Clear alignment will help reduce duplication, enhance legitimacy and support long-term sustainability.

Building on desk research, stakeholder input and the core principles, the following shared vision for GPEx emerged:

- GPEx should be a trusted, inclusive and practical system for sharing, testing and improving approaches to research culture across UK research and innovation.

- It should connect people and organisations from all backgrounds, help surface effective practice and support everyone working to make a difference in their settings.
- It should give leaders at all levels the insight and connections they need to lead change with confidence and credibility.
- By bringing together evidence, learning and leadership from across the system, it should make it easier for everyone to participate in, shape and benefit from a healthier, more inclusive and more collaborative research culture.

The following sections of this chapter present detailed findings from Phase 1, highlighting key takeaways and their contributions to subsequent project activities.

B.1. Phase 1 desk research

The project was underpinned by an initial scoping review to ensure that proposed delivery models for GPEx learned from existing initiatives without duplicating their focus areas. The following research questions built our foundational understanding of how GPEx could add value to the R&I sector:

1. What evidence exists regarding the impacts and outcomes of GPEx programmes?
2. What factors or features have been identified as critical to their success and effectiveness?
3. What value do different stakeholder groups – such as universities, funders, professional bodies, businesses or communities – attribute to such programmes?
4. What are the commonly identified strengths and limitations of GPEx approaches?

B.1.1. Commonly supported outcomes

GPEx approaches can support a wide range of positive outcomes, from improved service delivery and cross-sector collaboration to enhanced system responsiveness and inclusion. They enable organisations or communities facing similar challenges to exchange effective practices, often with support for facilitation, evaluation and contextual adaptation (Alexiou et al. 2025; OECD 2021; Rigby et al. 2021; Shared Intelligence 2020). Outcomes popularly supported by GPEx approaches have been explored below at three levels: service delivery, organisational learning and system-wide change.

At the service level, GPEx programmes have supported tangible improvements in access, quality and responsiveness (Rigby et at. 2021; Shared Intelligence 2020). For instance, embedding co-design practices in child health services in the Providing Enhanced Access to Child Health (PEAHC) project reduced preventable hospitalisations by enabling real-time feedback among families, clinicians, and commissioners (Vernon et al. 2025). The LGA has similarly improved confidence, leadership and sector-wide capacity through its emphasis on shared learning, mentorship and development (Shared Intelligence 2020).

At the organisational level, programmes have promoted deeper learning by challenging not only practices but also the assumptions and values that underpin them. This aligns with the concepts of 'double-loop learning' (Argyris & Schön 1978), in which feedback prompts reflection on goals and strategies, not just

methods. Adoption of such principles in peer exchange for civic innovation led to long-term changes in governance roles and resource allocation (Alexiou et al. 2025).

At the system level, GPEx initiatives have helped public services become more adaptive and responsive. The OECD (2021) highlights the importance of local insight, iterative learning and feedback loops in driving innovation under uncertainty. Some programmes have also advanced inclusion and digital access, particularly in resource-constrained settings. In Malawi, nursing education programmes used participatory design to adapt global blended learning models to local infrastructure constraints, improving retention and satisfaction (Konyani et al. 2024).

Thus, positive outcomes are most evident when the approach is adapted to local priorities, supported by organic engagement platforms and aligned with institutional values (OECD 2021; Rigby et al. 2021; Shared Intelligence 2020). For example, Health Innovation Manchester (HInM) convenes partners from the National Health Service (NHS), academia and industry to co-design and test innovations aligned with local priorities. By building sustained relationships and shared ownership, HInM has accelerated the uptake of research-informed practices and strengthened local innovation capacity, incorporating provisions for shared governance and iterative feedback loops (Rigby et al. 2021).

B.1.2. Enablers to outcomes realisation

Drawing on UK and international evidence, the literature review helped identify common mechanisms that support the design, uptake, and sustainability of GPEx approaches across different contexts. Co-production, boundary-spanning roles, adaptive cultures and sustained platforms are common mechanisms that work together to support meaningful exchange and lasting change.

Co-productive and collective ownership

Co-production was consistently identified as a common mechanism, especially effective in contexts where top-down approaches have struggled or where communities have been marginalised (Alexiou et al. 2025; Shin et al. 2023). For example, structured community advisory groups in US health equity programmes helped ensure that interventions reflected local priorities and lived experience (Shin et al. 2023). Closely linked to this is the principle of collective ownership, in which responsibility for change is distributed among participants. This approach increases mutual investment in outcomes and supports sustainability beyond the life of individual projects. In the PEACH initiative, for example, shared governance between clinicians, managers and community members enabled feedback to influence child health services in real time (Vernon et al. 2025).

Individual and organisational resources

Boundary spanners, i.e., individuals who connect people, ideas, and institutions across traditional divides, often act as facilitators or knowledge brokers, helping translate between contexts and maintain momentum. Their influence has been documented across multiple GPEx initiatives (Rigby et al. 2021; Teixeira et al. 2019). For example, they helped bridge community and policy domains in civic design networks in UK cities (Alexiou et al. 2025).

At an institutional level, GPEx approaches thrive in organisations that support openness, experimentation and decentralised leadership. As noted by Adeinat and Abdulfatah (2019), 'adhocracy' cultures –

characterised by flexibility, innovation and cross-functional collaboration – tend to be particularly conducive to peer learning and knowledge exchange. Infrastructural resources can amplify the positive impact of these factors by making participation more accessible and credible. For example, open registries, data-sharing tools and clear protocols provided by the Centre for Open Science (COS) and the Structural Genomics Consortium (SGC) support research transparency and multi-partner research without proprietary constraints.

Thus, the review suggested that GPEx is most effective when it operates within a broader ecosystem of trust, facilitation and shared ownership. On the contrary, the approach can fall short if engagement exercises are symbolic, if organisational structures reinforce power imbalances, or if facilitation is under-resourced. Since values such as openness, reflection and peer accountability are inconsistently embedded in the R&I sector, especially outside targeted equity or innovation initiatives (Plata 2024; Rossi & Rosli 2014; Striukova & Rayna 2015), scaling GPEx may require deliberate cultural groundwork.

B.1.3. Stakeholder's value perspectives

While evidence varies in scope and quality across sectors, clear patterns emerge in how stakeholders value different GPEx approaches, depending on their roles and needs. Their perspectives underline the need for a GPEx delivery model that is flexible, inclusive and aligned with the incentives of diverse participants. For example, communities are most engaged when they help shape both process and outcomes, i.e. when initiatives move beyond consultation to meaningful co-design (Alexiou et al. 2025; Vernon et al. 2025).

Universities and funders often see it as a way to mobilise knowledge and demonstrate public impact (Plata 2024; Rossi & Rosli 2014). Through innovation hubs, civic partnerships and research-practice collaborations, universities are increasingly acting as knowledge brokers – supporting the co-creation and application of research beyond academia (Plata 2024; Striukova & Rayna 2015). These roles are especially prominent in initiatives that combine institutional learning with external engagement, offering a potential blueprint for GPEx focused on research culture. While less prominently featured in the literature, funders and professional bodies are increasingly interested in GPEx approaches that emphasise learning and collaboration over compliance.

SMEs benefit from GPEx-style initiatives when these create accessible pathways to academic expertise, facilities or networks. Informal, trust-based partnerships – rather than contractual agreements – are often more productive and sustainable (Teixeira et al. 2019). Similarly, stakeholders from industry and large businesses show greater engagement in GPEx initiatives when these initiatives are aligned with business goals, such as access to research, talent, or infrastructure, and are supported by flexible collaboration models rather than rigid contracts (Perkmann et al. 2013; Rossi & Rosli 2014).

B.1.4. Evaluation frameworks and gaps

While the literature review uncovered growing interest in good practice exchange approaches for inclusive learning and system improvement, it also revealed persistent gaps in how these programmes are evaluated and how learning is shared across contexts. There is limited long-term evaluation of outcomes, few frameworks that assess learning and influence across systems, and inconsistent attention to equity and power. Evaluation practices are often siloed, limiting the potential for shared insight or systemic improvement across sectors (Mulgan 2014; OECD 2021). In addition, impact is often measured through

narrow indicators, with little attention to relational factors – such as trust, feedback loops or shared learning – that are critical for success but challenging to measure (Rossi & Rosli 2014; Alexiou et al. 2025).

Despite these limitations, emergent practices such as contribution mapping, developmental evaluation and realist evaluation move beyond output metrics to assess how relationships, shared understanding and adaptive capacity evolve. For GPEx, where cultural change is incremental and diffuse, these approaches may be particularly valuable.

Ultimately, GPEx should be understood not simply as a means of sharing practice, but as a strategic approach to enabling inclusive, adaptive and learning-oriented systems. When thoughtfully designed and supported, it can help institutions and networks respond more effectively to complex challenges. For GPEx, this means investing in the relationships, infrastructure, and reflexive practices that enable knowledge to be exchanged, adapted, and sustained across the system.

Insights from the literature review in this phase helped identify five core principles that should guide the development of GPEx (illustrated in Box 8). It also highlighted six prominent themes that informed the design of subsequent interviews and focus groups in this phase (see Box 9). Together, these recommendations provided a roadmap for both stakeholder consultation and delivery model design that is credible, inclusive and well-suited to the complexity of the UK research culture system.

Box 5. Core principles guiding the development of GPEx

1. **Facilitation-first approach:** Trusted facilitation and relational leadership are central to effective GPEx. Delivery should prioritise facilitation capacity – locally and nationally – over static content or tools.
2. **Flexible participation pathways:** Not all actors will engage in the same way. Providing multiple entry points, from informal peer exchange to structured learning cohorts, can broaden access while maintaining coherence.
3. **Integrated evaluation:** Evaluation should be developmental and participatory, focused on learning rather than compliance. Tracking equity, voice and influence will be key – especially for understanding cultural change over time.
4. **Structural equity:** Equity should be built into GPEx's design and governance, not just stated as a goal. Consider mechanisms like co-design panels, shared leadership, and equity audits to embed this principle in practice.
5. **Strategic alignment:** The model should connect with existing research culture initiatives, funding streams and networks. Clear alignment will help reduce duplication, enhance legitimacy and support long-term sustainability.

Box 6. Six themes for designing stakeholder engagement

1. **Infrastructure and support:** Explore what kinds of platforms, facilitation roles, or relationship-building mechanisms would make GPEx meaningful – especially for institutions or roles currently underrepresented in research culture work.
2. **Leadership and facilitation:** Invite reflection on who is best placed to lead or convene peer exchange in this space, and what skills, incentives or support structures would enable inclusive and credible facilitation.
3. **Equity and participation:** Explicitly examine how equity can be embedded into GPEx design, including whose voices are prioritised, what barriers exist, and how power is shared in decision making.
4. **Success and evaluation:** Use consultation to co-define what 'success' would mean for a research culture GPEx, and which cultural, behavioural or institutional outcomes should be tracked over time.
5. **Stakeholder value:** Ask participants what they would need to gain – practically or professionally – from participating in GPEx. These insights will help shape a compelling and credible offer.
6. **Alignment with institutional structures:** Encourage stakeholders to reflect on how GPEx could connect to existing governance systems, professional development schemes, or change initiatives. Drawing on sector-led models, explore how GPEx can complement – not duplicate – what already exists, and how it might be embedded in routine organisational practice.

B.2. Interviews

Evidence from interviews highlighted several practical enablers and barriers that shape how people engage with peer learning and knowledge exchange in the research culture context. One key theme commonly identified by interviewees was the balance between structure and informality. Existing research culture initiatives relied on mechanisms that often emerged organically (e.g. ad hoc peer meet-ups and lightly convened networks). The initiatives have also been enabled by shared values and goals rather than imposed frameworks. Successful GPEx models should similarly offer optional, lightweight structures to lend legitimacy and coherence to member-led engagement platforms and activities.

Interviewees strongly endorsed the use of evaluation as a development tool. There was widespread concern about the risks of performative metrics and compliance-driven accountability. Instead, reflective practices such as peer-to-peer feedback, regular feedback loops and transparent accounts of failure were seen as more credible and useful. Interviewees also highlighted the need for strategic clarity and coordination. Duplication fatigue was a common concern, with many calling for GPEx to build on existing networks, frameworks, and initiatives rather than introducing additional complexity. Credibility, legitimacy, and long-term impact are more likely when GPEx is perceived to align with sector priorities and complement other change efforts.

Sustainability through shared ownership was also seen as essential. Interviewees noted that culture work is often fragile when it depends on individual champions or is added to existing workloads without formal support. For activities to last and achieve wider impact, there needs to be broader leadership, visible organisational backing and some level of resourcing.

Equity and access emerged as important priorities, particularly for people from independent research organisations, heritage bodies, and smaller higher education institutions. These groups described past

experiences of exclusion from initiatives, sometimes due to limited capacity, insufficient facilitation support or being left out of decision making forums. Participants stressed that new approaches to practice exchange need to provide different ways to take part and offer extra support to those who have previously missed out.

Supplemented with insights from desk research, we used these findings to develop a longlist of 36 outcomes (see Table 5) that informed the design of the 'vision' focus groups in Phase 1, guiding discussions and debates among participants based on their perceived relevance and priority.

Table 5. Potential outcomes identified for GPEx

Building networks, sharing and collaboration: Providing a route for people across the sector to come together, share practices and collaborate		**Supporting more and better evaluation:** Helping more initiatives to be evaluated, using more robust approaches to understand what works		**Strengthening strategic leadership:** Encouraging system-wide culture-change through leadership support and coordinated action	
Coordinated cross-organisational collaboration that efficiently connects networks	Equitable access to knowledge, resources and influence	Evidence-informed decision making is standard practice in culture-change initiatives	Improved quality and comparability of evaluation across organisations and networks	Leadership on culture-change is distributed, credible and representative of the wider community	System-wide change is guided by a coherent, shared vision and coordinated action
Culture of openness, mutual learning and shared ownership of culture-change	Increased participation from diverse organisations and roles, especially under-represented groups	Culture-change efforts become more targeted, inclusive and sustainable	Broader awareness and use of evaluation frameworks for culture-change work	Culture considerations are embedded in planning, funding and communication practices	Organisations have greater confidence and capability to champion culture change
Trusted, accessible and sustained platforms for exchange (e.g. online hubs, regional meet-ups)	A pool of trusted facilitators and peer convenors who are supported and recognised	Peer learning through case studies and workshops builds evaluation confidence and skills	A culture that allows learning from success as well as failure across the sector	Diverse and non-traditional actors are supported as culture leaders across the system	Culture-change is resourced, visible and aligned with organisational strategies
Stronger alignment between initiatives, e.g. the Research Excellence Framework (REF), concordats, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and well-being)	Reduced isolation for those working on culture-change, particularly in under-resourced settings	Clear articulation of what "good" looks like, without enforcing rigid standards	Evaluation operates as a learning tool, not a compliance requirement	Leadership remains consistent through staff transitions and change cycles	Leaders are empowered by having access to peer spaces for reflection, challenge and support
Culture work is recognised as core, not peripheral, to research	Shared language and frameworks that can support coherence	More equitable and inclusive measures of progress and success	Greater use of qualitative and participatory methods	A clear vision for research culture, articulated and owned by the sector	Leaders actively model inclusive, values-based behaviour

Building networks, sharing and collaboration: Providing a route for people across the sector to come together, share practices and collaborate		**Supporting more and better evaluation:** Helping more initiatives to be evaluated, using more robust approaches to understand what works		**Strengthening strategic leadership:** Encouraging system-wide culture-change through leadership support and coordinated action	
Participation in networks is experienced as developmental, not burdensome	Culture work shifts from isolated roles to a shared, cross-functional responsibility	Evaluation practices are embedded in organisational strategies, not driven solely by funders	Evaluation findings inform resource allocation and help prioritise scalable, inclusive work	Ongoing leadership development is supported, with a visible community of practice	Culture-change leadership is recognised and rewarded in career progression

B.3. Vision focus groups

The vision focus groups in Phase 1 aimed to co-define a list of potential outcomes for GPEx through stakeholder inputs, and drew on the longlist developed using desk research and interviews (Table 5). Ranking exercises involving predefined outcomes, as well as open-ended questions that prompted participants to suggest meaningful outcomes, were combined to identify key potential outcomes for GPEx.

In total, 11 outcomes were identified as priorities based on the ranking exercise and thematic analysis of participants' responses. These are summarised in Table 6.

Table 6. Outcomes prioritised by the vision focus group participants

Objective	Desired outcomes
Building networks, sharing and collaborations	Coordinated cross-organisational collaboration that efficiently connects networks
	Stronger alignment between initiatives (e.g. REF, concordats, EDI, well-being)
	Culture work is recognised as core, not peripheral, to research
Support for more and better evaluation of research culture activities	Evidence-informed decision making is standard practice in culture-change initiatives
	Clear articulation of what "good" looks like, without enforcing rigid standards
	Evaluation evidence informs decision making and resource allocation
	Evaluation is a learning tool, not a compliance requirement
Strengthening strategic leadership	Leadership on culture change is distributed, credible and representative of the wider community
	Organisations have greater confidence and capability to champion culture change (e.g. through internal skill development for more people)
	Leaders actively model inclusive, values-based behaviours and set clear expectations around behaviours
	A clear vision for research culture articulated and owned by the sector

B.3.1. Additional outcomes and reflections

Participants strongly believed that the GPEx design should not introduce additional bureaucracy into the ecosystem. GPEx's priorities should evolve to support members' engagement with new policy actors to address issues that may emerge in the future. In addition, they suggested newer outcomes that have been added to the design process and summarised below.

Building networks, sharing and collaborations

Participants emphasised the creation of a well-connected community that facilitates new and equitable partnerships by enabling faster, agile responses to collaboration opportunities. This would ensure less

duplication of efforts across the sector and drive engagements across career stages and sectors. Participants highlighted that the resulting ecosystem would also recognise and value the efforts people put into refining collaborative approaches. These outcomes would be underpinned by universities' openness to collaboration, especially in the context of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise.

Supporting more and better evaluation

They expected that GPEx would facilitate a higher-quality research culture and an evidence-informed narrative of its impact. It may also increase the sector's willingness to implement new initiatives and to allocate funds consistently for evaluation and learning in budgets. Participants noted that GPEx's evaluation approaches would help better link 'culture' with the harder (often fiscal) objectives of national R&I programmes, e.g. through citations of GPEx-housed evaluations and data in government papers and media.

Strengthening strategic leadership

Participants highlighted that, as a result of GPEx, organisations should be able to pace their efforts in directed areas and with a clear distribution of responsibility, making research culture change feasible. However, organisations should be able to retain their distinctiveness even while engaging in similar activities to other stakeholders in the sector. GPEx must also enable participants to effectively address poor leadership and management practices, e.g. by encouraging new leadership models. Participants suggested that, in the long term, these outcomes would help shift towards broader changes in power-sharing and collaboration in R&I. They may also improve the UK's reputation as a global leader in R&I.

B.3.2. Thematic analyses

Building on the prioritisation exercise, participants shared their insights on mechanisms and motivations crucial for GPEx, based on their experience of existing research culture initiatives.[7] These revealed the major mechanisms, the conditions for success, the outcomes, and the potential added value of GPEx, with the key themes summarised below.

Mechanisms and formats

Participants praised diverse mechanisms such as peer networks (e.g. Researchers14 and UKRN), community forums, mailing lists, social media groups and 'open house' visits. In these examples, they emphasised maintaining a balance between formal and informal structures. For instance, organic, trust-based networks were considered more effective for candid exchange than formal initiatives. Similarly, digital repositories were said to be helpful only when paired with real-time, relational learning opportunities. In their examples, effective delivery formats blended a centrally coordinated initiative with place-based opportunities to allow for co-creation and two-way exchange.

Outcomes and value

An effective GPEx would support mutual adaptation across roles and institutions, with values placed on both practical learning and culture transformation. In research culture change, participants noted that visible, behavioural and systemic change – not compliance or performative actions – was seen as the real marker of success. Thus, contributions to capability-building, morale and retention through the embedding

[7] Thematic summaries of all eight focus groups are provided in Annex B.

of research culture in all R&I activities were seen as key outcomes. Participants also stressed that research culture agendas should be reshaped with cross-sector insights to stimulate innovation.

Conditions and infrastructure for success

Participants noted that, in their experience, successful efforts often began with central coordination, followed by a gradual transition to self-sustaining models (e.g. Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement and the Scottish Research Cultures Collaboration Manager position). Trust, safe environments for discussion and skilled facilitation were all identified as essential conditions without which sharing and collaboration would fail. They also advocated for decentralised leadership, light-touch coordination and sustained investment in infrastructure and roles. Since GPEx aims to build on existing research culture initiatives, it must avoid duplication across frameworks and sectors, thus reducing burden and enabling coherence.

Stakeholder roles and motivations

Participants noted that as a precondition for success, a wide variety of stakeholders (e.g. from industry, heritage institutions and independent research organisations (IROs)) must be equitably engaged from the outset. Motivations for engaging with GPEx may also vary across sectors, ranging from altruism to greater access to funding, prestige and learning. GPEx must accommodate this plurality of drivers and offer matching incentives. GPEx should recognise and incorporate opportunities for engaging with mid-career professionals and those outside formal leadership who often drive culture work. In addition, participants highlighted that a sense of shared responsibility for research culture change within R&I would be preferable to overreliance on individual 'culture champions.'

Evaluation and impact measurement

Participants noted a strong demand for participatory, reflective evaluation models rather than compliance-oriented approaches driven by metrics. Similarly, evaluation would be most useful for the R&I sector if it informs future adaptation, learning and research culture work. For example, sharing of evidence on failures and partial successes would help normalise experimentation and prevent avoidable failures. To achieve outcomes under this objective, GPEx should encourage evaluation capacity-building, strong learning frameworks and the sharing of tools and good practices across institutions.

Equity and inclusivity

Participants asserted that structural inequalities reinforced by institutions' sizes, available resources and visibility would affect stakeholders' access to networks and future GPEx activities. Emphasis on career mobility, cross-sector career pathways and recognition of hidden contributions through voluntary and unpaid labour were highlighted as significant drivers of inclusive culture. Thus, GPEx must balance scale with intimacy to ensure participation from broad stakeholder groups while creating safe, small-group environments for collaboration.

Sustainability and scalability

Based on their experiences, participants suggested that sustainable networks require resourcing, succession planning and alignment with institutional goals. Since fragmentation of efforts within existing research culture initiatives was seen as a threat, participants strongly called for shared platforms, long-term

coordination and a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches to achieve systemic change. To sustain impact, GPEx must evolve from an add-on to a core institutional function.

Together, these findings from desk research, interviews and focus groups helped outline the sector's **emerging vision** for GPEx:

- It should be a trusted, inclusive and practical system for sharing, testing and improving approaches to research culture across UK research and innovation.
- It should connect people and organisations from all backgrounds, help surface effective practice and support everyone working to make a difference in their settings.
- It should give leaders at all levels the insight and connections they need to lead change with confidence and credibility.
- By bringing together evidence, learning and leadership from across the system, it should make it easier for everyone to participate in, shape and benefit from a healthier, more inclusive and more collaborative research culture.

These findings have also informed the design of Phase 2, focusing on potential activity options and models for GPEx that could achieve the desired outcomes for stakeholders. Table 7 summarises the discussions held at the different vision focus groups.

Table 7. Summary of themes discussed in each vision focus group

Focus group slot	Summary of themes discussed on outcomes
Focus group 1	The focus group surfaced a range of outcomes that a successful GPEx model should aim to deliver. Participants stressed the need for flexible, inclusive mechanisms that enable engagement across different roles, sectors, and organisational types. They called for GPEx to drive visible, embedded culture change – rather than becoming another compliance exercise – while ensuring equitable access to knowledge and support. Strong evaluation capability, cross-sector collaboration, and alignment with existing initiatives were seen as essential for impact and sustainability. Crucially, participants highlighted the importance of strategic leadership that avoids uniformity, allowing institutions to retain distinctiveness while learning from one another through scalable, practical frameworks.
Focus group 2	Focus Group 2 provided rich insights into the mechanisms, values, and conditions that underpin effective GPEx models. Participants shared examples from global partnerships, peer-led initiatives, and cross-sector collaborations, illustrating the power of trust-based, often informal structures in enabling meaningful exchange. There was a strong call to reposition evaluation as a participatory, learning-driven process rather than a compliance mechanism – one that values narrative, lived experience, and openness about failure. Participants also emphasised the need for inclusion across sectoral boundaries, particularly for smaller institutions, cultural organisations, and industry partners, whose contributions to research culture are often overlooked. Throughout the discussion, contributors stressed that leadership must be values-led and that culture work should be resourced, embedded in strategy and aligned across initiatives to avoid duplication. These reflections reinforce the need for GPEx models that are flexible, inclusive and purpose-driven, able to adapt to different contexts while fostering a shared culture of mutual learning and improvement.
Focus group 3	Focus Group 3 surfaced urgent calls for systemic coherence, recognition, and support for research culture work. Participants described a sector weighed down by duplication, fragmented initiatives, and under-rewarded labour – especially around EDI and leadership. There was a strong appetite for a coordinated platform to reduce duplication, normalise failure and embed evaluation into practice. At the same time, contributors warned against centralised, performative structures, calling instead for a co-owned, inclusive model that reflects varied institutional motivations and resource levels. The session made clear that for GPEx to succeed, research culture must be resourced, recognised and seen as inseparable from the sector's core mission.
Focus group 4	Focus Group 4 offered a rich cross-sectoral perspective on GPEx, spotlighting both grassroots innovation and structural barriers. Participants stressed the value of informal, purpose-driven networks built on trust and peer recognition. They described a system saturated with initiatives but short on visibility, alignment, and capacity to engage – particularly for smaller or resource-constrained institutions. GPEx was seen as having the potential to address this by coordinating, amplifying and simplifying existing efforts. To succeed, however, it must foreground inclusion, use accessible language, create space for failure and be embedded in institutional planning. Leadership development, meaningful evaluation, and equitable access were seen as essential building blocks for sustainable, system-wide impact.

Focus group slot	Summary of themes discussed on outcomes
Focus group 5	This focus group surfaced a clear consensus that good practice exchange must be inclusive, reflexive and resourced to succeed. Peer networks and grassroots efforts were widely recognised as catalysts for change, particularly when built on mutual trust, shared purpose and ongoing dialogue. Participants emphasised the importance of articulating what 'good' looks like, while warning against homogenisation and tokenism. Practical enablers included coordination roles, peer-led evaluation methods and alignment with institutional strategies. Challenges such as competitive dynamics, inequitable access to funding and the risk of insular networks were also highlighted. They noted that a successful GPEx will depend on embedding evaluation and learning within a culture of openness, distributing leadership, and ensuring support extends beyond those already engaged.
Focus group 6	Focus Group 6 highlighted the effectiveness of blended models that combine peer-to-peer learning, candid dialogue, and accessible infrastructure. Organisations like the UK Research Integrity Office provide trusted frameworks, while grassroots forums and volunteer-led learning (e.g. at Samaritans) demonstrate the power of non-hierarchical exchange. Participants stressed the need to design accessibility from the start, to normalise cultural work within research activity, and to reward inclusive leadership across all levels. Evaluation emerged as both a practice and a principle. It was noted that involving affected communities in the design and delivery of evaluation improves quality and supports equity. The group cautioned against homogenising culture-change and called for GPEx to balance shared standards with contextual flexibility and distributed ownership.
Focus group 7	Participants in Focus Group 7 expressed a strong desire for GPEx to be rooted in structured yet flexible formats that promote ongoing engagement and shared learning. They called for co-design approaches that distribute leadership and ownership to build trust and legitimacy across sectors. Action-oriented methods – such as live peer review and open-house sharing – were consistently preferred over static presentations that instead lead to one-sided discussion and limited exchange of perspectives. Participants also emphasised the importance of separating learning from performance management to create psychologically safe environments. They wanted greater support for light-touch evaluation and clearer ways to recognise impact through peer validation. Overall, participants highlighted that GPEx efforts are more likely to be embedded and sustained when they align with institutional priorities, are visibly valued and make space for inclusive participation.
Focus group 8	Focus group 8 discussion explored effective mechanisms for GPEx within and beyond the research sector. Key themes included the need to connect fragmented networks, balance organic and structured approaches, and create safe spaces to share successes and failures. Participants stressed the importance of trust, shared leadership, and embedding research culture as a strategic institutional priority rather than relying on individual champions. Industry engagement was highlighted as a challenge due to differing incentives and timelines, requiring better alignment and clearer collaboration pathways. Evaluation was seen as an area needing improvement, with calls for shared frameworks and more accessible evidence. Equity and inclusivity concerns centred on uneven access to networks and influence, and there was broad agreement that sustainable change requires moving from isolated efforts to integrated, system-wide approaches. Overall, participants supported a GPEx model that is inclusive, evidence-informed, and capable of driving long-term culture-change through coordinated leadership and cross-sector collaboration.

Annex C. Mapping activities and desired model characteristics

Building on the vision proposed in Phase 1, the second phase aimed to identify modular activities that could be implemented to achieve the shortlisted outcomes. A longlist of potential activities from desk research was developed and tested in a sector-wide survey, which led to the identification of the models most prioritised: Evidence and Standards Centre, Peer Learning and Convening Network, and Capacity-Building and Leadership Hub. Second round of focus groups alongside a project workshop at International Research Culture Conference 2025 helped shortlist the following activities for GPEx that were tested in Phase 3:

- Centrally curated evidence base that brings together examples of what works in different methods, contexts and outcomes, providing a shared point of reference to guide future activity.
- Tools for practical evaluation support, such as toolkits, templates and exemplars.
- Modular learning opportunities, such as workshops, short missions and Challenge Labs for capacity-building.
- Targeted staff exchanges that promote cross-sector learning.
- Lightweight brokering to match needs with expertise, leveraging existing networks rather than building new services.
- Non-competitive recognition (e.g. institutional acknowledgements or profile raising) that legitimises culture work without creating winner-takes-all dynamics.

C.1. Phase 2 desk research

We conducted a second round of desk research to identify pathways between existing GPEx activities and the shortlisted outcomes from Phase 1. This research included a comparative analysis of activities conducted by the What Works Network, the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement, Local Policy Innovation Partnerships, Westminster Working Cultures, and international models such as European Cooperation in Science and Technology Actions and the Open Science Monitoring Initiative. Findings have been analysed below, complemented by expert interpretations from CRAC-Vitae.

C.1.1. Existing models for GPEx

Analysis of comparative initiatives demonstrates that modularity operates at several levels: to structure delivery for flexibility and responsiveness, to sequence and combine activities, and to safeguard against dependence on any single institution, individual or format. In the most effective GPEx systems, this means

designing each component to be separable, combinable and adaptable to different groups' priorities and capacities. This structural approach enables a system to respond to local needs and thematic challenges, providing opportunities for experimentation without undermining overall coherence.

The Westminster Working Cultures programme is illustrative in its use of modularity. By building engagement around discrete, time-bound exchanges and alumni-led mentoring sessions, participants can select relevant modules without committing to a single engagement type in the long term (University of Westminster 2025). This structure lowers the barrier to entry, encourages diverse participation and allows topics and modes of interaction to be refreshed and rotated in response to demand. Over time, the accumulation of these short-format modules generates continuity, not through fixed membership, but through evolving communities and shared practices.

The Local Policy Innovation Partnerships further highlight the value of modular design in cross-sector collaboration. Early pilots have shown that sustained partnership is achieved not through a single overarching programme, but by enabling a set of co-produced, thematically driven activities that can be initiated, concluded, or reconfigured as required. This light-touch, modular coordination – anchored by regional convenors – supports adaptation to local context and enables new actors to enter or lead different parts of the system at different times (Local Policy Innovation Partnership Hub n.d.; UKRI 2024). The effect is to foster innovation and learning through cycles of collaborative problem definition, peer experimentation and joint review.

The experience of the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) underscores the role of modularity in capacity building. NCCPE offers a series of distinct yet connected opportunities: self-assessment and benchmarking tools, the Engage Academy peer cohort model and the Engage Watermark, which recognises institutional progress over time (NCCPE 2023; NCCPE 2025). These modules can be accessed independently or as part of a broader journey, with institutions and individuals able to engage at their own stage of readiness or with specific interests. Trust-based convening and a focus on developmental benchmarking, rather than prescriptive standards, ensure that participation remains meaningful across a diverse field.

A further dimension of modularity appears in the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) Actions, which represent a longstanding, bottom-up approach to peer-led exchange. COST's system is built around short-term scientific missions, training events, and collaborative meetings that can be initiated by participants themselves, without the need for central approval (COST 2025). This minimal-bureaucracy, participant-driven model allows for rapid formation and dissolution of groups, as well as continual adaptation of content and delivery mode. The governance structure, rooted in peer-elected committees, enables decentralised ownership and ongoing recalibration of priorities.

Implications

Across all these models, modularity is tightly coupled with the principle of distributed leadership. Thematic centres or regional hubs act as connectors rather than gatekeepers, providing facilitation, light coordination, and legitimacy to activities that remain locally or thematically owned. This decentralisation ensures that practice exchange is not only scalable but also resilient, reducing the risk of over-centralisation and supporting the emergence of new leaders from different backgrounds and organisational types.

Another consistent feature in the evidence is the use of short-term, rotational formats – whether for peer learning, mentoring or collaborative innovation. These dynamic structures support the continuous introduction of new perspectives and participants, avoiding fatigue and enabling different groups to contribute expertise at the right time. Rotation of hosting or facilitation roles helps to democratise ownership and creates a culture in which responsibility for exchange is shared rather than siloed.

Embedded, learning-focused evaluation is another recurring element in successful modular systems. The What Works Network, for example, integrates evaluation within all activity modules, using shared standards of evidence but allowing adaptation to context (Cabinet Office 2023). This approach positions evaluation not as a compliance mechanism, but as a tool for collective learning and improvement. Reflection, peer feedback and transparent accounts of both progress and challenge are prioritised over static performance metrics, supporting iterative refinement and trust in the system.

It is the combination of flexible delivery, distributed leadership, short-form activities and robust support structures that is likely to allow a modular system to be both inclusive and effective in supporting research culture change. However, there are numerous risks: without coordination, activities can duplicate each other, quality and facilitation may be inconsistent, and learning may become siloed or fragmented. Comparative models suggest that these risks can be mitigated by providing clear guidance, investing in facilitator development and creating shared spaces for capturing and sharing learning.

C.1.2. Models for GPEx

The review of existing initiatives highlighted several ways GPEx could be organised to drive positive change in research culture. Building on stakeholder input from Phase 1 and comparative initiatives discussed above, a consultation paper was developed for sector feedback and shared alongside a survey instrument.[8] The paper outlined five activity models through which GPEx could support its three core objectives: connecting networks, supporting better evaluation and strengthening leadership in research culture.

Model 1. An Evidence and Standards Centre

GPEx acts as a trusted, independent source of evidence and practical standards for research culture. It curates, synthesises, and shares lessons and case studies from across sectors. This model provides clear, accessible guidance and practical tools for self-assessment, benchmarking, and continuous improvement. By surfacing what works and setting out what good looks like – without imposing rigid standards – GPEx helps organisations and individuals evaluate progress, learn from each other and align efforts for greater collective impact.

How this supports outcomes: Clarifies expectations, supports better and more meaningful evaluation, and helps the system articulate and work towards shared goals.

Model 2. A Peer Learning and Convening Network

GPEx serves as a connector and facilitator, providing a trusted platform where people from different organisations, sectors and roles come together to share experiences, surface effective practice and learn

[8] The consultation paper can be reviewed at: https://files.smartsurvey.io/3/0/GY6P55TN/Consultation_Paper_for_Good_Practice_Exchange.pdf (as of 13 March 2026).

collaboratively. Through peer learning cohorts, thematic communities of practice and regular practice-sharing exchanges – both in-person and online – participants can troubleshoot challenges, develop new approaches and build mutual trust. This model values distributed ownership and relational infrastructure, ensuring participation is accessible, inclusive and non-hierarchical.

How this supports outcomes: Strengthens cross-sector networks, enables rapid identification of partners and builds system-wide capacity for collaborative culture change.

Model 3. A Capacity-Building and Leadership Hub

GPEx focuses on developing the skills, confidence and leadership needed to champion research culture change across all parts of the system. It offers structured training, tailored mentoring and leadership development, with a strong emphasis on supporting those from underrepresented or less well-resourced backgrounds. By surfacing diverse experiences and enabling peer-led learning, this model equips organisations and individuals to drive culture improvement. It also provides recognition and progression opportunities for those who take on cultural leadership roles.

How this supports outcomes: Builds capacity, strengthens leadership and ensures a wider range of people and organisations can participate in and shape research culture.

Model 4. An Innovation Accelerator and Funding Platform

GPEx acts as a catalyst for experimentation and practical change by offering small grants, microfunding and partnership support for new projects or approaches to research culture. This model lowers barriers for entry – especially for those in smaller organisations or outside traditional networks – and encourages rapid piloting and sharing of both successes and failures. By surfacing and supporting new ideas and spreading learning quickly, the Innovation Accelerator helps to ensure that research culture improvement is dynamic, inclusive and responsive to emerging needs.

How this supports outcomes: Stimulates innovation in the research culture, ensures culture change is resourced and visible, and brings new actors and approaches into the system.

Model 5. A Regional Convenor

GPEx is delivered through a network of regional convenors – trusted individuals or organisations who coordinate local activities, connect partners and support engagement in their area. These convenors play a vital role in surfacing local needs, highlighting effective practice and ensuring that learning is shared widely, not just concentrated in a few national centres. This model provides accessible entry points for smaller or less connected organisations and ensures that the benefits of improved research culture reach all parts of the system.

How this supports outcomes: Improves equity of access to discussions/leadership on research culture change, amplifies local strengths and closer links with regional/local actors and ensures research culture learning and support is available across all regions and sectors.

C.1.3. Potential activities for GPEx

The five activity models drawn from desk research and stakeholder feedback were expanded to highlight related activities and delivery formats. The suggested activities aim to support participation at different levels, accommodate diverse organisational contexts and enable both focused and system-wide learning (see Table 8).

Table 8. Summary of proposed activities

Option	What is it? / How does it work?	Who is it for & why care?	What does it achieve? (Aligned with practical outcomes)
Peer learning cohorts	Small groups from different roles, organisations, or sectors meet for a set period, supported by skilled facilitation and a clear focus. These groups allow honest exchange, practical troubleshooting, and collaborative problem-solving. Cohorts are most effective when membership is diverse, and there is the opportunity to rotate roles or propose topics.	Anyone wanting a supportive space to share experiences, build confidence, and learn from others working on research culture.	Helps more people from different backgrounds connect, learn what works (and what does not), and develop skills and confidence to lead or support change.
Challenge-based co-design labs	Brings together people with different perspectives to tackle a shared challenge in research culture. Uses structured sessions to define problems, try solutions, and reflect together. Effective when participation is resourced, and learning is shared.	People who want to solve research culture problems together and see practical change.	Enables practical, shared solutions, spreads lessons learned and ensures more voices shape how research culture can improve.
Digital resource and exchange hub	An online platform for sharing tools, guidance, and real examples – regularly curated, with options for Q&A, discussion, and live feedback. Open to contributions from anyone, and especially helpful for newcomers or those in smaller or less-well-resourced settings.	Anyone needing easy access to resources and ideas to improve research culture, especially those new to this work or outside large organisations.	Makes it easier to find partners, tools and examples for improving research culture. Supports fairer access and quick sharing of lessons across the system.
Regional or sector convenors	Local or sector leads organise events, broker partnerships, and support participation from underrepresented organisations. Convenors help reduce duplication, bring in new groups, and create trusted entry points.	People wanting support that fits their local area or field, or who are new to national networks.	Expands who can take part, helps new organisations get involved and ensures research culture work is more visible and joined-up across regions and sectors.
Practice-sharing sessions	Live events – virtual or in-person – where people and teams share their recent experiences, including what worked and what did not. Rotating hosts and themes brings new perspectives and helps avoid the 'usual suspects'.	Anyone looking for practical ideas and honest stories from people facing similar research culture issues.	Builds understanding and helps people learn together.

Option	What is it? / How does it work?	Who is it for & why care?	What does it achieve? (Aligned with practical outcomes)
Evaluation support toolkits	Practical guides and templates to help track change, learn from results, and share feedback – developed by and for peers. Designed to be easy to use and adaptable across contexts.	Anyone who wants simple ways to measure and show progress in research culture, not just report for compliance.	Supports learning-focused feedback, makes it easier to show what is working, and encourages ongoing improvement in research culture.
Capacity-building workshops and mentoring	Structured workshops and mentoring to develop facilitation, project, or evaluation skills, alongside peer learning. Tailored for different levels of experience and open to all roles.	Anyone wanting new skills or the confidence to take on more active roles in improving research culture.	Helps more people gain skills and confidence to lead or support change, and brings new voices into research culture work.
Leadership development programme	A series of training, peer learning and mentoring modules to help people at all career stages lead research culture change – especially those who are underrepresented. May include placements or mentoring.	Anyone wanting to lead research culture work, especially those without previous leadership opportunities.	Makes leadership more inclusive and visible, builds networks, and ensures progress in research culture is recognised and supported.
Cascade funding	Small, flexible grants to help people test ideas, partner with others, or address local research culture priorities. Especially helpful for smaller teams or those new to this work.	Anyone with ideas for improving research culture but lacking resources, and teams wanting to make a local difference.	Enables more people to try new ideas, supports fairer access and helps share learning from small-scale experiments.
Targeted support for underrepresented groups	Dedicated peer groups, leadership support, or funding for those who are less represented in research culture activities. Designed in partnership with the communities served.	Anyone who has felt excluded from research culture activities, or wants a fairer chance to get involved or lead.	Ensures opportunities and support for research culture work are more fairly distributed and brings new voices into decision making.
Brokering support (connector service)	A service to match people seeking advice, collaborators, or mentors with those who can help – particularly valuable for those less connected or new to research culture networks.	Anyone needing help finding the right partner, mentor or collaborator in research culture work.	Makes it easier to connect, join in, and get support – especially for those outside main networks.
Direct evaluation support (peer review/advice clinics)	Structured sessions for peer feedback or advice on evaluation, building supportive, learning-focused cultures. Inspired by sector-led improvement models.	Anyone looking for tailored feedback or reassurance on whether their research culture efforts are working.	Encourages reflection and learning, builds confidence, and makes sharing progress and lessons more useful and supportive.

Option	What is it? / How does it work?	Who is it for & why care?	What does it achieve? (Aligned with practical outcomes)
Recognition scheme for research culture leadership	Publicly recognises and celebrates individuals, teams, or organisations making a positive difference in research culture. May include awards, profiles or certifications, and highlight both visible and behind-the-scenes contributions.	Anyone whose work to improve research culture is often overlooked, and organisations seeking to motivate and value this effort.	Makes research culture work more visible and valued, motivates participation and encourages new leaders and good practices to emerge.
Vision and standards setting	GPEx works with the sector to agree and update a clear vision and practical standards for a good research culture. This is informed by regular consultation and learning from across sectors.	Anyone seeking clarity and a shared understanding of research culture, and a simple way to align efforts and measure progress.	Makes it easier for people and organisations to work towards the same goals, recognise progress and know what 'good' looks like.
Exchanges and secondments	Short-term placements or exchanges where people work or learn in another organisation, sector, or role. Can be virtual or in-person, structured or informal. They help people experience different research cultures and bring back new ideas.	Anyone who wants hands-on learning, new skills, and a deeper understanding of different research cultures – especially valuable for building networks and breaking down silos between sectors.	Builds connections across boundaries, spreads practical know-how, brings fresh ideas into organisations and supports more inclusive and innovative research cultures.

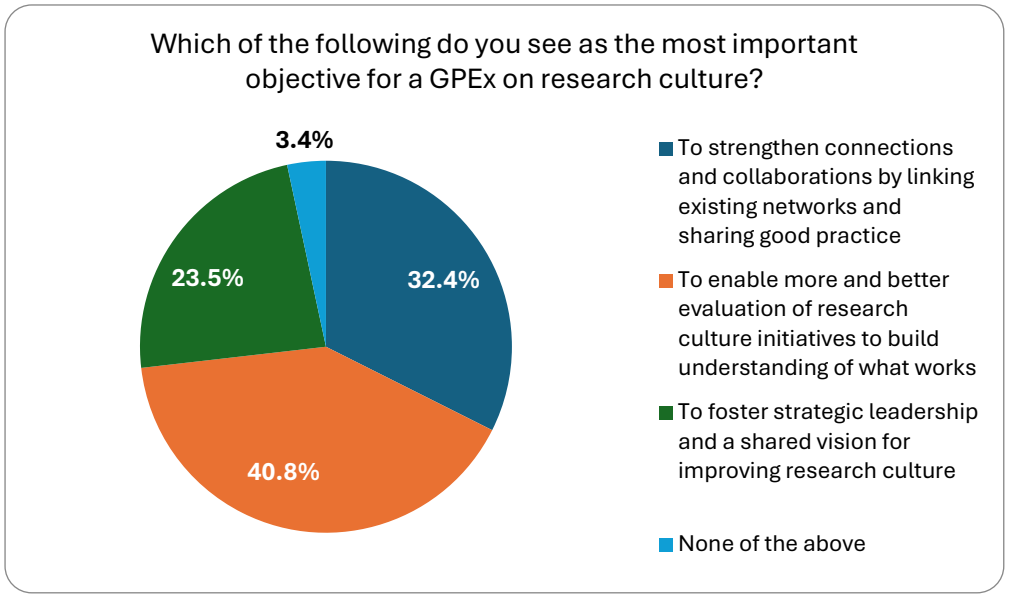
C.2. Consultation survey

The consultation paper, developed following Phase 2 desk research, was widely shared with R&I stakeholders in the UK. It invited stakeholders to take part in a short survey to record their views on the five activity models' feasibility, relevance and the mechanisms that would influence their participation in GPEx. This section shares insights and subgroup trends drawn from analysis of 179 survey responses across HEIs, non-profit and charitable organisations, industries and government agencies.

C.2.1. Research culture priorities

The survey asked respondents to identify which of the three GPEx objectives they considered most important, or indicate 'None of the above' if they considered none most important. Some 40% of respondents selected 'Enabling more and better evaluation of research culture initiatives' as the most important objective, followed by 'Strengthening connections and collaborations' (32.4%) and 'Fostering strategic leadership' (23.5%). Only 3.4% of respondents selected 'None of the above', while 96.6% selected at least one of the three proposed objectives – suggesting that these proposed GPEx goals align with the sector's priorities.

Figure 5. Prioritised objectives for GPEx



We observed regional differences in how respondents prioritised the individual goals. The majority of respondents from Northern Ireland (8 of 15 respondents) and Scotland (18 of 39) selected 'Strengthening connections and collaborations', whereas most respondents from England, Wales and UK-wide institutions opted for 'Enabling more and better evaluation'. Similarly, most respondents from public-sector research organisations (7 of 15) selected 'Strengthening connections and collaborations' as the most important objective, while other groups – including HEIs, SMEs and non-profits – opted for 'Enabling more and better evaluation'. This result shows that needs vary across the sector and that GPEx must deliver a combination of activities that balance these needs to be useful across stakeholders.

C.2.2. Ranking GPEx models

The survey reiterated the five activity models from the consultation paper to spur respondents' thinking:

1. An Evidence and Standards Centre
2. A Peer Learning and Convening Network
3. A Capacity-building and Leadership Hub
4. An Innovation Accelerator and Funding Platform
5. A Regional Convenor.

To aid respondents, we provided a brief description of each model alongside the question. We then asked respondents to rank the five models and share how likely they or their organisation would be to engage with each.

Based on Borda count analysis, the top-ranked models across all respondents were the Evidence and Standards Centre, Peer Learning and Convening Network and Capacity-building and Leadership Hub models.[9] Each response was weighted according to the rank respondents assigned to it (e.g. first-ranked = 4 points, fifth-ranked = 0 points). The Evidence and Standards Centre model was also ranked first most often (40.8% of respondents).

Table 9. Borda count analysis of proposed activity models

Models	Borda points
Evidence and Standards Centre	486
Peer Learning and Convening Network	429
Capacity-building and Leadership Hub	398
Innovation Accelerator and Funding Platform	301
Regional Convenor Model	176

Among respondents in Northern Ireland and Wales, the Peer Learning and Convening Network model accumulated the most points. In contrast, the Evidence and Standards Centre model was ranked highest among respondents in England, Scotland and UK-wide institutions. These results suggest that stakeholders view GPEx as a mechanism to bring together and add coherence to different research culture initiatives across the UK, enabling learning from existing efforts.

[9] Borda count analysis is a method to analyse ranked data. Each response is weighted by the points assigned to the selected rank. For a total of n ranks, each rank k is assigned $n - k$ points. In this analysis, respondents assigned ranks from '1' to '5', where rank '1' represented the most value added and rank '5' represented the least. We designed the following weights: 4 points for rank '1', 3 points for rank '2', 2 points for rank '3', 1 point for rank '4' and 0 points for rank '5'.

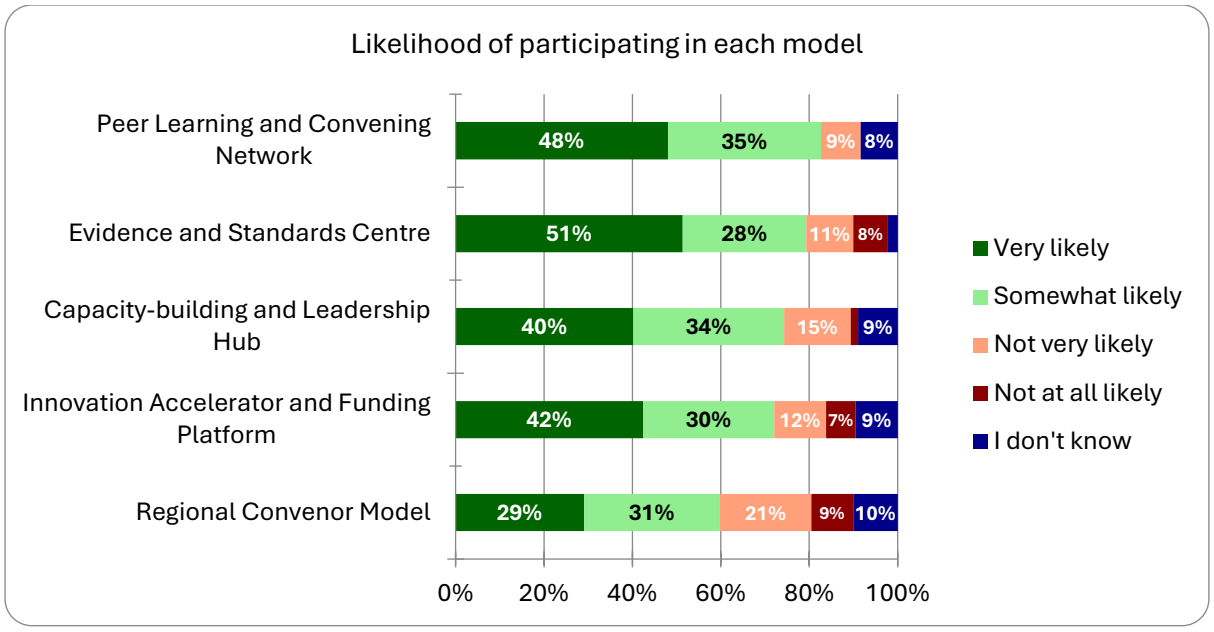
Across sectors, the Peer Learning and Convening Network model ranked highest for SMEs. Other stakeholder groups – including HEIs, non-profits, large firms and public-sector research organisations – ranked the Evidence and Standards Centre model highest.

C.2.3. Likelihood of participating in each GPEx model

We asked respondents to assess how likely they or their organisation were to participate in each GPEx model. Responses used a four-point Likert scale: 'Very likely', 'Somewhat likely', 'Not very likely', 'Not at all likely' and 'I don't know'.

Based on the strongest appetite level, the Evidence and Standards Centre model emerged with the highest proportion of 'Very Likely' responses across the five models. However, when aggregating positive responses ('Very Likely' and 'Somewhat Likely'), marginally more respondents selected the Peer Learning and Convening Network (82.7%) than the Evidence and Standards Centre model (79.3%). The Capacity-Building and Leadership Hub model came in third, with 72.1% positive responses.

Figure 6. Likelihood of participating in each model



Regional and organisational variation:

Most respondents from Northern Ireland (12 of 15) reported a similar likelihood ('Very likely' and 'Somewhat likely') of participating in an Evidence and Standards Centre or Peer Learning and Convening Network model. While both models are equally popular in Northern Ireland, more respondents (10 of 15) were 'Very likely' to participate in a Peer Learning and Convening Network model than in an Evidence and Standards Centre one (7 of 15). Northern Ireland's preference for a Peer Learning and Convening Network model was also reflected in their prioritisation of different models and in their likelihood of participation.

This result aligned with responses from other devolved nations, with more respondents from Wales (8 of 8), Scotland (32 of 39) and England (81 of 100) 'Very' or 'Somewhat likely' to participate in a Peer Learning and Convening Network model. While an Evidence or Standards Centre model was more valued and ranked higher, respondents felt more likely to participate in GPEx operating in a convening role.

A convening role also attracted higher anticipated participation across stakeholder groups, with a majority of respondents from HEIs (104 of 122) and non-profit and charitable organisations (14 of 18) rating their likelihood of engagement with this model positively. In contrast, most respondents from SMEs (7 of 9) and public-sector research organisations (12 of 15) would likely take part in an Evidence Centre model.

Our analysis of stakeholders' prioritisation and anticipated likelihood of participation revealed that the GPEx model should incorporate a broad range of activities, including peer learning, evidence synthesis, sharing of good standards and capacity-building, to achieve the desired research culture outcomes.

Additional models and activities

A total of 40 respondents used the open-text prompt to share ideas for additional activities, models or principles to consider in designing and delivering GPEx. We discuss the themes that emerged from qualitative analysis of these responses below.

Respondents highlighted several factors that would affect their engagement with GPEx. Four respondents shared how 'wider challenges in the R&I sector', such as temporary employment contracts, financial challenges and bureaucratic responsibilities on researchers, would affect participation in and value of GPEx. Along similar lines, one respondent added that GPEx should consider variations across sectors and institutions.

Respondents suggested several activities that would enhance GPEx outcomes. Four respondents proposed that 'activities to engage with or influence policy' would add value to GPEx's outcomes. Examples provided include GPEx outputs contributing to funding and organisational policies, as well as REF assessments. Respondents identified active strategic leadership and usable evidence repositories as additional crucial factors for improving the uptake of GPEx outcomes.

In the context of existing research culture initiatives, four respondents reiterated that GPEx should identify gaps to avoid duplication, learn from international models and avoid overambitious goal-setting. In response, GPEx could adopt a phased approach by identifying key priorities for coordinated action within the sector.

Examples of discrete principles and activities proposed by respondents include the following:

- Combining activities from two or more models (N = 3).
- Capacity-building at individual and institutional levels to help resource-constrained organisations (N = 3).
- Countering overrepresentation of stakeholders proactive in the sector to encourage participation from new organisations and convenors (N = 2).
- Incorporating principles of research integrity (N = 2).
- In-depth assessment of organisational changes before implementation, including any consequences or harm emerging and sharing evidence of unsuccessful initiatives (N = 2).
- Investing in existing models over GPEx (N = 1).

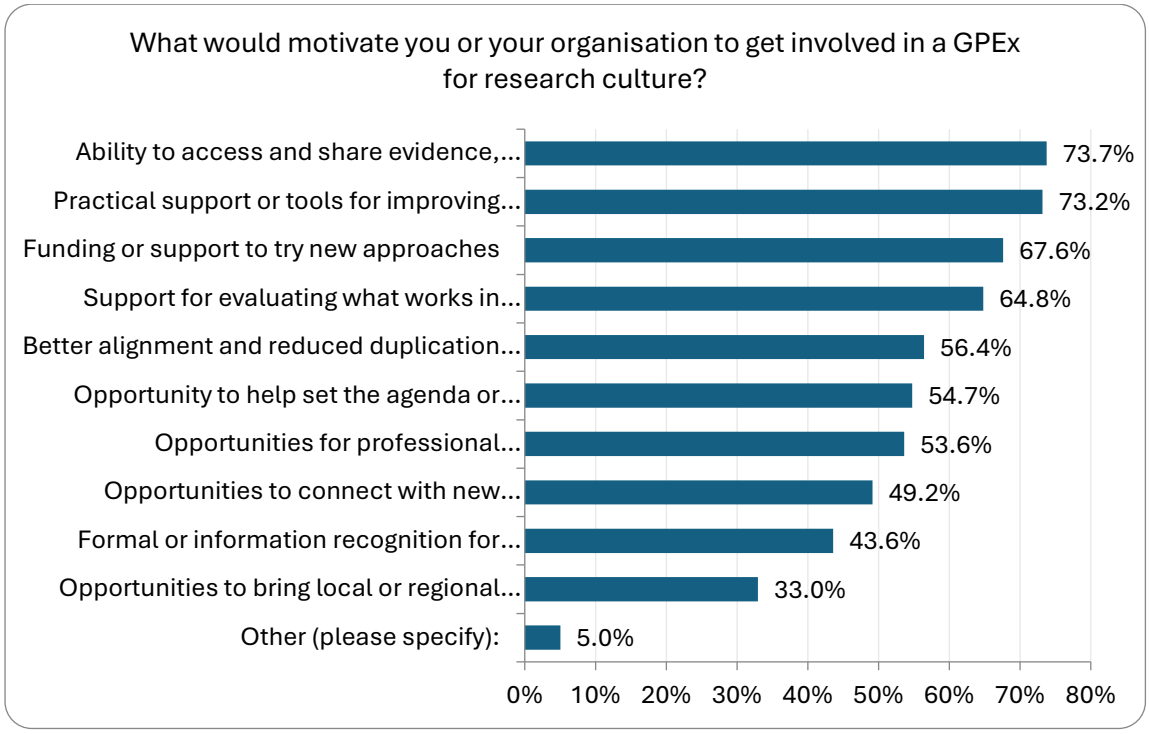
C.2.4. Enablers to stakeholder participation in GPEx

To understand factors that would encourage the sector's participation in GPEx, we provided respondents with the following ten options:

1. Opportunities to connect with new partners or networks
2. Practical support or tools for improving research or workplace culture
3. Ability to access and share evidence, guidance and good practice
4. Funding or support to try new approaches
5. Opportunities for professional development, including skills and leadership training
6. Formal or informal recognition for leadership or collaboration in research cultures
7. Better alignment and reduced duplication of research culture activities
8. Support for evaluating what works in research culture
9. Opportunities to bring local or regional priorities to a wider network
10. Opportunities to help set the agenda or priorities for research culture activities.

Over 73% of respondents identified 'access to evidence and good practice' and 'practical support or tools for improving research culture' as the top two factors encouraging their participation in GPEx. 'Funding or support to try new approaches' ranked third among the top enablers, while 'opportunities to bring local and regional priorities' was the least common enabler, selected only by 33% of respondents.

Figure 7. Factors enabling GPEx participation



Regional and organisational variation:

The 'Ability to access and share evidence' was a highly reported enabler across all stakeholder types and regions. In Northern Ireland, 'opportunities to connect with new partners or networks' was also frequently identified (joint highest with the 'ability to access evidence'). While reporting similar trends for preferred enablers, more Scottish respondents selected 'practical support for improving research culture' (29 of 39), and more Welsh respondents selected 'support for evaluating what works' (7 of 8) as key enablers.

Based on organisation type, most respondents from non-profit institutions (12 of 18), SMEs (7 of 9) and public-sector research organisations (13 of 15) selected 'access to evidence' as a key enabler. Among non-profit institutions, 'funding or support to try new approaches' was also selected by the joint-highest proportion of respondents. Conversely, 'practical support or tools' received the highest proportion of responses among HEIs.

Additional enablers

Nine respondents provided open-text responses identifying additional factors that could enhance their involvement in GPEx. Three respondents described activities for translating research into practice for development, increasing outputs and advocating for the role of the third sector. One respondent highlighted that they would prefer opportunities to engage at an individual level, given their organisation's challenging work environment. Examples of other enablers include interdisciplinary research, co-ownership of Intellectual-Property-generated (IP-generated), centralised data collection practices, visibility of research professionals and advocating for a good research culture in Wales.

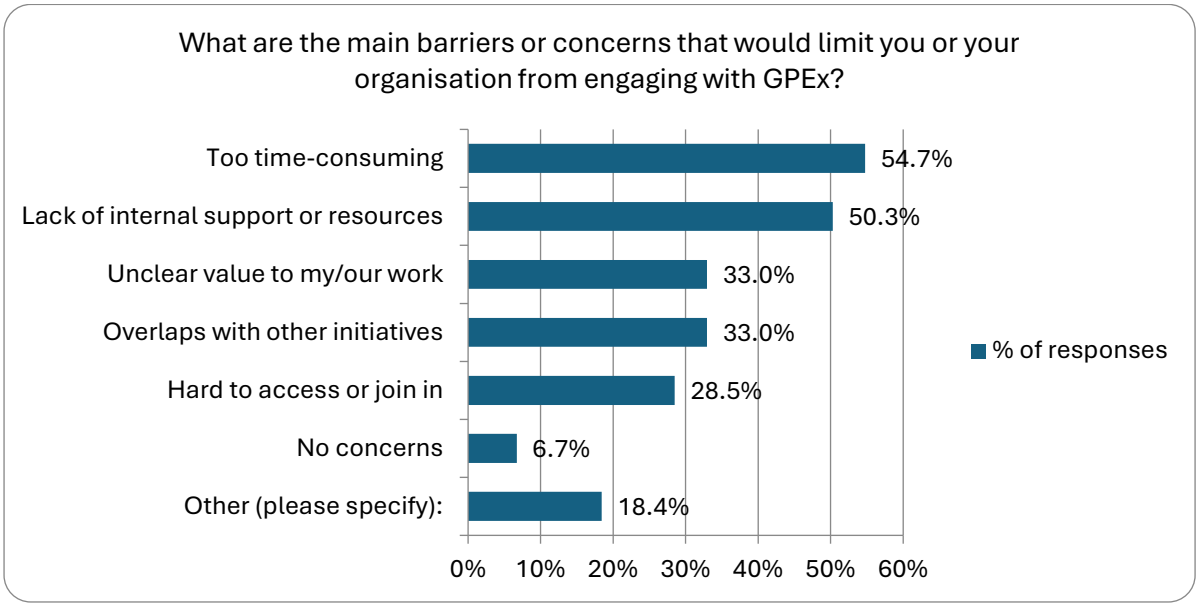
C.2.5. Barriers to stakeholder participation in GPEx

To understand factors that would limit stakeholders' participation in GPEx, we provided respondents with the following six options:

1. Too time-consuming
2. Hard to access or join in
3. Unclear value to my/our work
4. Overlaps with other initiatives
5. Lack of internal support or resources
6. No concerns.

The highest proportion of respondents selected the time commitment required to engage with GPEx (54.7%), followed by a lack of internal mechanisms within their organisations that would support participation (50.3%). This result suggests that dedicated, resourced time to engage with GPEx would encourage participants to become involved, with engagement not expected beyond contracted hours.

Figure 8. Factors hindering GPEx participation



Regional and organisational variation

Time commitment was reported as a barrier by the highest proportion of respondents from England, Scotland and Wales. However, for Northern Ireland, marginally more respondents selected 'unclear value' as the main barrier.

Similar to the aggregated results, the proportion of respondents reporting time commitment as a barrier was highest among HEIs, non-profit institutions and public-sector research organisations. On the other hand, the lack of clarity about GPEx's added value was the biggest barrier for most SMEs in the sample, consistent with findings from the Phase 1 desk research.

Additional barriers

A total of 33 respondents used open-text prompts to describe additional barriers they believed would affect participation in GPEx. Five respondents highlighted that GPEx should clearly define the 'benefits expected from good research culture' and participation in GPEx. Outcomes should be practical and not high-level or inapplicable, as a one-size-fits-all approach would not be relevant for independent research organisations and SMEs.

Six respondents shared concerns about the manipulation or hijacking of research culture agendas, the lack of EDI principles, and perceptions that research cultures are difficult to change or that organisations do not respect individual researchers' contributions. To counter this, one respondent suggested that GPEx should maintain its focus on system-level change to avoid becoming an initiative of research culture specialists. 'Unclear recognition' and 'financial constraints' were other significant barriers respondents reported would affect their participation. One respondent perceived GPEx as a short-term activity that would limit their interest in taking part. These findings indicate that to encourage participation and ensure relevance, GPEx must define and clearly communicate its added value to the R&I community and focus on practical application.

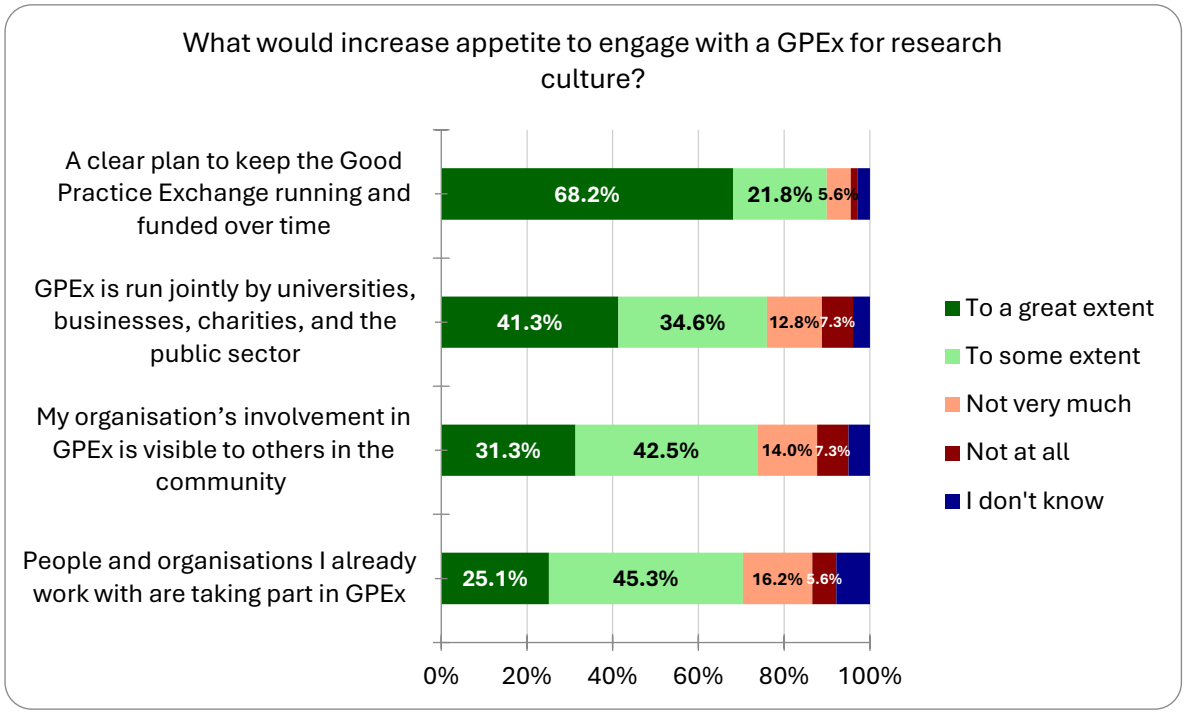
C.2.6. The sector's appetite to engage with GPEx

To supplement the insights drawn from key enablers and barriers, we showed respondents a set of operational factors that might increase their appetite to engage with GPEx, including:

1. GPEx being jointly run by universities, businesses, charities and the public sector
2. A clear plan to keep the GPEx running and funded over time
3. People and organisations that the respondent already works with also taking part in GPEx
4. The respondent's organisation's involvement in GPEx being visible to others in the community

A GPEx driven by clear planning and funding emerged as the strongest factor increasing 68.2% respondents' appetite to engage 'to a great extent'. When also aggregating positive responses ('to a great extent' and 'to some extent'), the highest proportion of respondents selected 'clear planning' (89.9%).

Figure 9. Appetite to engage with GPEx



Regional and organisational variation

Similar to the aggregated results, most respondents from HEIs, non-profit and public-sector research organisations, SMEs and large firms selected a 'clear plan' as the main factor that would increase their appetite to engage with GPEx. Public-sector respondents also frequently selected the joint involvement of cross-sector stakeholders in the operation of GPEx. Seven of nine respondents from SMEs also selected visibility of involvement as a key factor increasing appetite 'to a great or some extent'.

C.2.7. Additional comments

A total of 50 respondents used open-text prompts to share additional comments on GPEx's design and success. Qualitative analysis of these responses revealed that the 'benefits of participating in GPEx' was the

most common theme suggested by respondents (N = 7). This included explaining why GPEx is broadly needed, creating pathways to tangible impact and showcasing direct outcomes from people's participation to build meaning to their engagement. One respondent suggested that involvement in GPEx could be rewarded under REF.

Four respondents cautioned that a broad scope could lead to a lack of focus. Thus, GPEx should explicitly define its goals and tailor them to cross-sector needs. Four respondents were sceptical of GPEx, suggesting that it would exacerbate resource constraints at the individual level due to job security concerns. Two respondents also highlighted that universities' involvement would be affected by financial challenges.

Other principles and factors discussed by respondents included:

- Mechanisms to promote cross-sector participation (N = 4).
- GPEx's position in the context of existing activities and reducing duplication of effort (N = 3).
- Ensuring outputs are practical and pragmatic, with visible support for stakeholders who are not specialists in research culture (N = 4).
- Visible participation and support from senior leadership (N = 2).
- Drawing from historical contexts underpinning research culture in the UK (N = 1).
- Ensuring that GPEx is implemented without further delays (N = 1).
- Supporting existing activities that can be sustained when funding for GPEx is stopped (N = 1)
- Flexible ways of being involved and representation from devolved nations (N = 1).
- A clear model for cascading information and opportunities for early career researchers (N = 1).
- Increasing the visibility of GPEx in media and Parliament (N = 1).

Results from the consultation survey highlighted that wider support exists among R&I stakeholders for better evaluation of what works in research culture, and for using peer-learning and leadership development programmes to bring systemic change across the UK. Broader insights from the consultation, including mechanisms, factors influencing appetite for engagement and main concerns, informed the design of further stakeholder engagement in Phase 2.

C.3. Implementation focus groups

A second round of focus groups was conducted in September 2025 to test the top three models prioritised by survey respondents: the Evidence and Standards Centre, Peer Learning and Convening Network, and Capacity-building and Leadership Fund. Additional details about the models have been shared in Boxes 4–6.

While each model had its advocates, there were clear patterns in what participants appreciated and what they found challenging:

- The **Evidence and Standards Centre** model was widely praised for its potential to consolidate and share robust evidence on what works in research culture. Participants valued its emphasis on evaluation, toolkits and practical guidance, and saw it as a way to bring coherence to a fragmented

landscape. However, concerns were raised about the risk of rigid standards-setting, the sustainability of digital repositories and the potential for exclusion if hosted by a single HEI, particularly a Russell Group university (with the caveat that this is the scenario we provoked a response on) that is well resourced and therefore not considered representative of the wider sector.

- The **Peer Learning and Convening Network** model was seen as the most feasible to implement, especially if structured around small grants and challenge labs. Participants appreciated its potential to foster collaboration and support underrepresented groups. However, many worried that it might replicate existing networks and become a 'talking shop' with limited outcomes. There were also concerns about equity in grant access and the risk of privileging novelty over the exchange of existing good practice.
- The **Capacity Building and Leadership Hub** model received mixed reviews. Participants liked its focus on mentoring, secondments and leadership development, especially if these activities were inclusive and well-supported. However, the idea of hosting this model within an R&D company raised significant concerns about conflicts of interest, data ownership, and alignment with public-sector values (with the caveat that this is the scenario we provoked a response on). Some felt the model was agile and people-focused, while others feared it would reinforce top-down dynamics and exclude grassroots voices.

Table 10 summarises the discussions held at the different implementation focus groups.

Table 10. Summary of themes discussed in each Implementation focus group

Focus group slot	Summary of themes discussed
Focus group 1	Participants in this focus group shared a strong appetite for practical tools, shared standards and trusted evidence. They raised concerns about inclusivity and ownership, especially regarding Russell Group dominance. They emphasised the need for an adaptable evaluation approach and sector-wide coherence, highly valuing the evidence and standards centre model for its potential to centralise and validate good practice. They appreciated the peer learning network model for its decentralised, collaborative nature, while seeing the capacity-building hub as useful but potentially duplicative of existing leadership programmes. They also welcomed immersive visits and exchanges, but highlighted that these may not need formal structuring. In addition, they emphasised that while leadership buy-in is essential, the selected model must also serve underresourced institutions.
Focus group 2	Participants in the second focus group reported a desire for sector-wide coordination without duplication and highlighted the importance of accessibility for smaller institutions, industry and the third sector. However, they had mixed views on centralised vs distributed leadership. They saw the evidence model as adding value, but viewed the Peer-Learning model as the most feasible and inclusive. The second model also led to concerns about governance and duplication. Similarly, participants liked the leadership focus in the Capacity-Building model but reported concerns about corporate housing and its relevance. For example, hosting of the model by a Russell Group university or R&D company raised concerns about optics and inclusivity.
Focus group 3	The third focus group reported strong support for evidence sharing and practical resources. They also discussed concerns about exclusion through grant-based models or corporate ownership. While there was interest in leadership development, there was also scepticism about duplication. Participants rated Model 1 (the Evidence and Standards Centre) highest for additional value, and Model 2 (Peer Learning) as the most inclusive. Participants also reported concerns regarding the effectiveness and reach of the Capacity-Building model. Overall, they shared that, while a 'one-stop shop' for research culture evidence is needed, it must be carefully curated and inclusive.
Focus group 4	Participants in this focus group emphasised the need for inclusive leadership and sustainability. They reported strong resistance to Russell Group universities leading the initiative. They emphasised the need for inclusive leadership, especially involving post-92 institutions, the third sector and industry. In particular, they rated immersive visits as high-impact activities and catalysts for deeper learning and systemic change. They also emphasised the importance of maintaining repositories and online outputs long-term and integrating them into institutional practice, not just individual development. They valued Model 1 (the Evidence and Standards Centre model) for its potential to consolidate learning and support evaluation. However, concerns about exclusivity and governance dominated the discussion. Participants appreciated Model 2 (the Peer Learning & Convening Network model) for its distributed funding and collaborative ownership, but raised concerns about maintaining coherence across rotating leadership. Model 3 (the Capacity Building ad Leadership Hub model) was seen as offering strong activities but questioned for its focus on individual leadership and industry-led governance.

Focus group slot	Summary of themes discussed
Focus group 5	Participants in this focus group critiqued national academies leading the initiatives as they felt it would exclude non-academic roles and reinforce existing hierarchies. They emphasised tangible tools and funding for underrepresented groups, valuing models that support real-world experimentation and learning. They also raised concerns about short-term funding and the lack of incentives for senior leaders to engage meaningfully. Participants valued Model 1 for its evidence-based focus but raised concerns about exclusivity and lack of integration with broader academic and non-academic communities. They saw Model 2 as the most feasible, with appreciation for challenge labs and peer learning. Model 3 was voted the most inclusive, but participants criticised it for overlapping with existing leadership programmes and for lacking clear additionality.
Focus group 6	Participants in this focus group raised concerns about Russell Group dominance and emphasised the need to engage SMEs and non-university partners. They called for a balance between individual and institutional focus, appreciating models that support both personal development and systemic change. Participants also saw value in collaborating with industry but questioned the incentives, alignment and industry's role in leading the initiative. They saw Model 1 as offering the most additional value, especially if the activities are inclusive and flexible. They viewed Model 2 as the most feasible, and questioned Model 3's distinctiveness and sustainability.
Focus group 7	Participants emphasised funding as a critical enabler for participation, especially for underresourced institutions and sectors. They voiced a preference for collaborative, cross-sector governance to ensure neutrality and inclusivity. Participants valued Model 1 for its immersive visits, evaluation support and potential to build a trusted evidence base. They saw Model 2 as feasible and inclusive, but raised concerns about corporate ownership in Model 3.
Focus group 8	Participants in this focus group reported a strong desire for robust, context-sensitive evidence to guide research culture change. They raised concerns about the duplication and proliferation of low-impact initiatives, as well as scepticism about corporate leadership. They highly valued Model 1 for its potential to fill the evidence gap, but raised concerns about centralised HEI ownership. They saw Model 2 as feasible and inclusive, but perceived a risk that it could become a 'talking shop'. Participants appreciated Model 3 for its agility and potential to support individual change, but raised concerns about conflicts of interest, data ownership and sustainability if led by the private sector.

C.3.1. Activities – what does GPEx do?

Across all eight focus groups, there was strong support for GPEx to serve as a centralised mechanism for collating and sharing an evidence base of what works in research culture. Participants consistently emphasised the importance of evaluation support and practical toolkits. These were seen as essential for enabling institutions and individuals to implement meaningful change.

Several activity formats were particularly well received. Immersive exchanges and secondments were praised for their potential to foster deep learning and cross-institutional insight. However, participants noted that these would require careful planning, including funding for backfilling and accessibility considerations. Theme-based challenge labs were also popular, viewed as a novel and constructive way to address specific issues in research culture. Capacity-building activities, especially training and mentoring, were widely endorsed, as was the idea of brokering or match-making between those seeking support and those able to offer it.

Digital resources received cautious approval. While some participants saw value in an online repository or hub, many raised concerns about sustainability, maintenance and cost-effectiveness as they require significant up-front investment and may become outdated rapidly, limiting their use. Similarly, participants welcomed, in principle, recognition of research culture leadership, but were wary of it becoming a competitive or duplicative exercise.

Conversely, several activities raised concerns. The idea of setting standards was viewed by many as potentially rigid and exclusionary, with fears that it could stifle innovation or fail to accommodate diverse contexts. Peer learning activities, while familiar, were criticised for replicating existing networks and the risk of becoming 'talking shops' with limited tangible outcomes. Operationalising immersive visits and brokering across sectors was also questioned, particularly regarding logistics across sectors and incentives for participation. Some saw leadership development as too narrow a focus, calling for broader capacity building instead.

Participants offered several suggestions for improvement. There was a clear call for shared protocols and evaluation baselines to ensure consistency and comparability across initiatives. Many felt that GPEx should interface more explicitly with existing initiatives such as Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA), Vitae, UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN), Research on Research Institute, Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) and the Metascience Unit, and draw on existing evidence bases in areas like reproducibility, open science, research assessment and public engagement. Challenge labs were seen as genuinely additive, while peer exchange sessions were often viewed as duplicative. Finally, participants stressed the need for GPEx activities to bridge individual learning with organisational and systemic change.

C.3.2. Audience – who is GPEx for?

Participants expressed a strong desire for GPEx to foster cross-sector collaboration, particularly between HEIs and non-HEI partners. There was widespread support for ensuring that GPEx serves underrepresented groups in research culture work and that its activities are accessible across all career stages. Some participants also saw value in engaging senior leaders, especially if the People, Culture and Environment (PCE) element remains part of REF2029.

However, participants frequently raised concerns about inclusivity. Many worried that smaller institutions, non-HEI organisations and individuals outside the usual networks might be excluded. Where activities focused on industry engagement or senior roles, participants questioned how buy-in would be achieved and what the value proposition would be for these groups. There was also a sense that GPEx risked being dominated by research culture experts, potentially alienating others.

Suggestions for improvement reflected a tension between breadth and focus. Some participants argued that GPEx should be broad and inclusive, 'for many, not few', while others cautioned against trying to be 'everything to everyone', warning that this could dilute its impact. There were specific callsto include middle management roles and individuals with lived experience as researchers. Despite the emphasis on inclusivity, several participants questioned the relevance of GPEx for companies and senior staff, suggesting that a clearer articulation of value is needed.

C.3.3. Delivery mode – who is GPEx accessible to?

The GPEx delivery mode was another area of rich discussion, and participants mainly focused on the research-grant delivery mode.[10] Many participants appreciated the idea of a grants model, particularly if appropriately resourced. This model was seen as a practical way to enable participation and justify engagement, especially in financially constrained environments.

Nonetheless, concerns about equity were prominent. Participants noted that grant models could favour well-resourced institutions and individuals with experience in applying for funding, potentially excluding others. There was also a risk that such models would prioritise novelty over the exchange of existing good practice, as grants can be seen as requiring the generation of new ideas. Some felt that grant-based approaches might duplicate existing schemes, which are themselves not always equally accessible.

To address these concerns, participants stressed that any engagement must be properly funded – not just travel costs, but also staff time and full cost recovery. Several also noted that grant models could offer opportunities to tap into alternative funding streams, thereby helping diversify support and reduce reliance on a single source.

C.3.4. Governance – who decides?

Governance emerged as a critical factor in determining GPEx's credibility and inclusivity. Participants who commented on governance models expressed a clear preference for structures that include diverse organisation types, roles, and career stages. Inclusive governance was seen as essential to ensuring that GPEx reflects the needs and perspectives of the whole sector. However, concerns were raised about the potential lack of diversity or transparency in governance structures. Some participants questioned whether the proposed models adequately ensured representation and accountability. There was a repeated emphasis on the need for governance to be inclusive, representative and clearly defined.

[10] Grants and contract-based modes were the two main options considered for GPEx delivery. For a discussion on the implications of each mode, please see the final report's section on 'Inputs.'

C.3.5. Leadership – who coordinates?

Across the focus groups, participants expressed mixed views on who should lead GPEx coordination. There was some support for national academies or learned societies to take on this role, particularly because they are perceived as neutral conveners with cross-sector reach. These organisations were seen as potentially well-placed to facilitate collaboration and provide credibility without being tied to the interests of a single institution.

However, concerns were raised about the suitability of any single organisation, especially a Russell Group university or an R&D company (with the caveat that this is the scenario we provoked a response on), for a leadership role. Participants feared that such arrangements could reinforce existing hierarchies, exclude smaller or non-traditional institutions, and skew the agenda toward the interests of the host. Similarly, rotating governance models, while intended to distribute power, were viewed by some as potentially incoherent and lacking continuity. There were also reservations about the academies themselves, with some participants perceiving them as elitist or inaccessible, particularly to those outside the traditional academic sphere.

Suggestions for improvement focused on the need for distributed leadership and shared power within any consortium. Participants emphasised that whoever leads GPEx should demonstrate clear organisational commitment to implementing its evidence base and best practices. Additionally, they called for careful consideration of power dynamics to ensure that leadership structures do not inadvertently marginalise certain voices or sectors.

C.3.6. Ownership – who owns GPEx outputs?

There was broad agreement among participants that GPEx should be collectively or collaboratively owned. This principle was seen as essential to ensuring that the exchange is inclusive, transparent and representative of the diverse stakeholders involved in research culture work.

Despite this consensus, tensions emerged around how ownership should be structured. Some participants expressed concern that centralised control could undermine the bottom-up ethos that many felt was critical to GPEx's success. Others worried that, without clear ownership protocols, especially for data and outputs, the initiative could become fragmented or lack accountability, thereby affecting GPEx's sustainability.

To address these concerns, participants recommended that GPEx clarify who owns the data and outputs it generates. They stressed the importance of transparency in decision making and shared responsibility across the consortium. This would help build trust and ensure that GPEx outputs are used effectively and equitably across the sector.

C.3.7. Outcomes – what is achieved?

Participants had high expectations for what GPEx could achieve. Many hoped it would enable meaningful cross-disciplinary and cross-sector learning, helping to break down silos and foster collaboration between HEIs, industry, and other research actors. There was also a strong desire for GPEx to develop a credible evidence base that could influence funders and shape policy, particularly regarding research culture and evaluation. However, several participants expressed concern that the current models lacked clarity about the intended outcomes at the individual, organisational, and system levels. Without a clear articulation of what

success looks like, they feared that GPEx might struggle to demonstrate impact or secure long-term buy-in. Clearly defining the added value of GPEx as a mechanism that enables coherence and inclusiveness and communicating this to the wider R&I community, along with the clear pathways to impact outlined in the GPEx ToC, would help overcome these concerns.

To strengthen the initiative, participants called for clearer implementation pathways and better integration with existing evaluation systems, such as the REF. They also emphasised the need to articulate how learning from GPEx would be embedded and sustained within institutions, and how it would translate into tangible improvements in research culture. This included a call for greater emphasis on how outputs would be used, recognised, and contribute to broader systemic change.

Thus, across all models, participants consistently emphasised the need for integration with existing initiatives, clarity on outcomes, and mechanisms to ensure that individual learning translates into organisational and systemic change. They called for inclusive governance, transparent ownership, and delivery modes that are equitably resourced and accessible to all parts of the sector. Participants also suggested combining elements from different models, as adopted in the final delivery model presented in the accompanying report and in the interim models presented at a workshop (see Section C.4).

C.4. Workshop at the International Research Culture Conference

Building on the implementation focus groups, the team presented two further developed models at the International Research Culture Conference 2025 in Warwick, shared below and in Boxes 10 and 11:

- **Culture Evidence Hub:** A collaborative and evidence-led cooperation initiative to transform research environments.
- **Culture Capacity Accelerator:** A programme for immersive learning and capacity building on research culture.

The analysis below draws out the key themes from this session.

C.4.2. Culture Evidence Hub

Box 7. Culture Evidence Hub model summary

GPEx focuses on distributing system change grants underpinned by infrastructure and support for effective grant delivery. It combines evidence and expertise mapping elements from the 'Evidence and Standards Centre' model with exchange activities from the Peer-Convening model, alongside uptake of learning within organisations and the ecosystem through capacity-building activities. The key details are outlined below:

- **Lead for delivery:** Credible neutral organisation such as a national academy or learned society, with support from delivery partners with research culture leadership and/or national reach.
- **Governance:** Advisory board with cross-sector representation and Community council as a rotating group of researchers, practitioners and managers
- **Funding support:** Participants applying for grants must include at least three different organisation types and demonstrate diversity of roles and career stages. Applicants are also expected to have experience in delivering and/or evaluating theme-related research culture activities. Pre-grant support is available for potential applicants.

Participants responded positively to the idea of a centralised hub that could consolidate existing evidence, reduce duplication, and offer bespoke support. The model's emphasis on peer-to-peer exchange and co-learning was seen as a strength, particularly in helping organisations understand how research culture frameworks might transfer across different settings. The concept of evidence and expertise mapping was especially well received, with participants noting its potential to avoid repeat projects and increase coordination.

The governance structure, featuring a rotating council and advisory board with diverse representation, was praised for its inclusivity. Delivery by a neutral organisation was seen as beneficial, though participants acknowledged that true neutrality is difficult to achieve. Train-the-trainer approaches and pre-grant development support were highlighted as important for enabling equitable access, especially for smaller or less experienced organisations.

However, concerns were raised about whether the Culture Evidence Hub model fully aligns with UKRI's broader GPEx objectives. Participants questioned the feasibility of achieving system-level change and whether organisational leadership would be sufficiently incentivised to drive transformation. The expectation that applicants for GPEx delivery have prior experience was seen as a barrier, potentially replicating inequalities in the current funding landscape. The requirement for joint grants across three organisation types was viewed as overly complex, and there was uncertainty about what beneficiary grants would actually deliver.

The £0.5m budget option was widely considered inadequate for this model. If such a constraint were unavoidable, participants recommended prioritising evidence mapping and digital infrastructure. They also cautioned that digital hubs often fail due to a lack of visibility and buy-in, but noted that if UKRI were to champion the hub, it could achieve critical mass.

Key messages from the session reinforced these concerns. While there was a clear appetite for GPEx, participants felt the development process must keep pace with the opportunity to implement. While co-creation was seen as valuable, some felt that sufficient consultation had occurred and that UKRI should

now proceed with delivering GPEx. There was also a warning that GPEx's structure could inadvertently exacerbate inequalities if not carefully designed.

Suggestions for improving the model:

- Shift from project-based grants to a programme-level funding model
- Introduce two-tier grants to support organisations with no prior experience
- Use limited budgets to map and share learnings from existing research culture projects
- Include participant steering and rotating governance for inclusivity
- Require open access outputs via a centralised portal
- Develop a shared language across organisational types
- Consider how GPEx could influence UKRI and contribute to REF debates.

C.4.3. Culture Capacity Accelerator

Box 8. Culture Capacity Accelerator model description

GPEx focuses on capacity-building through training programmes and a rolling micro-funding scheme. It combines elements of practical evaluation support from the' Evidence and Standards Centre' model with cohort-based change from the 'Peer-Convening' model, alongside a train-the-trainer programme and additional dissemination support for peer learning. The key details are outlined below:

- **Lead for delivery:** An organisation with proven training and evaluation capacity-building experience, supported by delivery partners with research culture leadership and/or national reach.
- **Governance:** A strategic board with cross-sector representation, supplemented by a Programme advisory council (formed on a rotational basis that reviews content and mechanisms for support) and a Participant Steering Forum (bottom-up feedback loops).
- **Funding support:** Those applying for micro-funding should be in a role that allows them to deliver and/or evaluate research practice. They should also be able to demonstrate pathways for ensuring that learning is translated into local outcomes.

The Culture Capacity Accelerator model was praised for its collaborative ethos and its focus on building in-house evaluation expertise. Participants valued the cohort-based approach (e.g. as in UKRI's Future Leaders Fellowships) where participants go on a development journey together and can leverage peer expertise, potentially centred on 'change of challenge labs'. The model's emphasis on train-the-trainer and multi-mode engagement was seen as adaptable to different organisational contexts and resource levels.

Evaluation support was highlighted as a major strength, given the sector-wide shortage of expertise. Participants felt that embedding evaluation into programmes and training people to do it well was essential. The idea of micro-funding[11] was welcomed, but only if it included a feedback loop to generate shared

[11] The model included rolling micro-funding programmes, inviting applicants to implement learnings through clear connection with organisational commitment or action plans.

benefits. A participant steering forum was seen as a good mechanism for bottom-up accountability, and leadership from an organisation with experience in evaluation and training was considered appropriate.

Despite these strengths, participants raised concerns about the model's ability to influence recognition and reward systems that shape research culture. The £0.5m budget was again seen as insufficient, and there were doubts about whether micro-funding would lead to meaningful impact. Cohort groups were viewed as limited in scale and scope, and there were questions about how to engage those not already invested in culture change.

Participants also worried that reliance on external contractors to deliver training and capacity-building could dilute the model's effectiveness. The 'train-the-trainer' concept was questioned: who would be trained, and would institutions have the resources to engage? Strategic leadership was seen as underaddressed, and secondments were flagged as problematic due to unclear roles and limited institutional buy-in.

Key messages from the session reinforced the need for adaptability. GPEx must be able to respond to changing sector needs and interact with emerging initiatives. Participants stressed that the evaluation component must be robust and methodologically sound, especially given the community's fatigue with surveys and consultations.

Suggestions for improving the model:

- Lead the model via a consortium representing the full R&I landscape
- Learn from outside the HEI sector through cross-sector exchange
- Consolidate existing initiatives to avoid duplication
- Ensure sustainability: clarify whether funding is annual or long-term
- Flesh out the practical details of change labs
- Consider a reflexive, cyclical learning-training model
- Introduce evaluation 'buddies' or mentors
- Open up application pathways and reduce barriers to entry
- Explore subscription or commitment models to embed GPEx in organisational structures
- Ensure equity in access and consider effort-to-reward ratios for micro-grants.

C.5. Agreement Matrix

We mapped stakeholder feedback for each model to an agreement matrix, which helped identify areas of convergence, common priorities, and divergences. We also mapped stakeholder feedback on the different activity models presented in the consultation survey, implementation focus groups and project workshop onto an agreement matrix to identify areas of strong consensus, divergence and priority (Table 11). We considered the following parameters in the matrix:

- **Theme:** The broad area of focus with related points of agreement to show where support clustered.

- **Agreement:** This summarises what participants agreed on regarding the various themes. For items marked as literature review evidence, we drew insights from case studies and connected them to themes discussed in the focus groups.
- **Consensus strength:** We judged this according to how frequently participants raised a particular area across the focus groups:
    - **Strong:** Those raised in most focus groups with little pushback
    - **Moderate:** Those raised in several groups, but with caveats
    - **Emerging:** Those taken mostly from review evidence or comments raised in some focus groups.
- **Priority:** Based on how the participants positioned issues in the focus groups, either as 'must-haves' and top concerns or ranked explicitly during online Miro board activities. No priority was assigned to themes derived solely from the literature review.
- **Costing considerations:** We drew these from focus group comments (e.g. staff backfill, travel and repository upkeep). For those emerging solely from the literature review, notes are given when evidence elaborates on resource implications.
- **Closest model alignment:** This indicates which of the three illustrative GPEx models best matches the theme.

Table 11. Agreement matrix mapped to three models from the 'implementation' focus groups

Theme	Agreement	Consensus Strength	Priority	Costing considerations	Notes/conditions	Closest alignment with model (specific elements, if any)
Activities – evidence base	Strong support for a centrally curated evidence base that brings together examples of what works in different methods, contexts and outcomes, providing a shared point of reference to guide future practice. Participants emphasised that it should connect with existing organisations and networks active in related areas to avoid duplication and strengthen the visibility of ongoing work.	Strong	High	Requires resourcing for curation and upkeep	Seen as the biggest gap across the sector	Model 1: Evidence Hub
Activities – evaluation support	Practical evaluation tools (templates, protocols, exemplars) so projects can generate comparable, decision-useful evidence.	Strong	High	Needs funded staff time to design & update	Helps consistency and reduces duplication	Model 1: Evidence Hub
Activities – capacity-building	Tiered learning offers (short clinics, cohort programmes, mentoring) to build evaluation and culture-change skills across roles and seniorities.	Strong	High	Costs for facilitation and participant backfill	Should offer flexible formats, with some participants noting the value of options that can be used at different times.	Model 3: Capacity-Building
Activities – capacity-building	Literature review evidence: capacity-building should include modular and participant-led formats (short missions, rotational hosting, alumni mentoring) to lower barriers and democratise ownership.	Emerging (review evidence)	N/A	Requires coordination and flexible funding pots	Continuity comes from evolving communities rather than fixed memberships.	Raised in the literature review. Focus group (FG) participants asked for flexibility and shorter formats; the review extends this to modular, rotating, participant-led approaches.

Theme	Agreement	Consensus Strength	Priority	Costing considerations	Notes/conditions	Closest alignment with model (specific elements, if any)
Activities – exchanges	Targeted exchanges (shadowing, secondments, challenge labs) that transfer practice and accelerate solution-finding, not just networking.	Moderate/ strong	Medium	Funding needed for travel, backfill and accessibility support	Innovative and potentially impactful if resourced properly, but participants also noted challenges in operationalising such schemes across sectors.	Model 3: Capacity-Building (Immersive/Exchange Hub)
Activities – brokering/mentoring	Lightweight brokering to match needs with expertise, leveraging existing networks rather than building new services.	Moderate	Medium	Low to medium cost if brokered centrally	Valued for connecting needs with expertise	Model 2: Peer Convening with elements of Model 3 (Capacity-Building)
Activities – digital hub	A curated resource hub consolidating high-quality tools and case studies with clear provenance and review status.	Emerging	Medium	Ongoing cost for maintenance, moderation and sustainability	Liked only if curated, trusted and sustainable, with some reluctance linked to previous negative experiences of digital hubs becoming outdated or unused.	Model 1: Evidence Hub
Activities – recognition	Non-competitive recognition (e.g. institutional acknowledgements or profile raising) that legitimises culture work without creating winner–takes-all dynamics.	Emerging	Medium	Low direct cost, but high design/resource burden if awards-based	Only supported if it does not duplicate existing awards, with additional concerns raised about potentially introducing competition rather than recognising collective contributions.	Cross-cutting (bolt-on, not core to a single model)
Audience – inclusivity	Designed equally (targeted access/support) so underrepresented groups can participate meaningfully, not just be invited.	Strong	High	Additional funding needed for equitable access	Described as non-negotiable	Included in all models but particularly emphasised through elements of Capacity-Building and cascade funding

Theme	Agreement	Consensus Strength	Priority	Costing considerations	Notes/conditions	Closest alignment with model (specific elements, if any)
Audience – career stages	Whole-career accessibility, with formats that work for early-career, mid-career and senior staff. Also need to address a range of roles.	Strong	High	Cost implications vary (early-career or professional services may need more support)	Seen as essential for fairness	Model 2: Peer Convening and Model 3: Capacity-Building
Audience – Cross-sector collaboration	Active involvement of all stakeholder groups, including higher education institutions, industry, the third sector and others, in collaborative work on shared challenges of mutual relevance.	Moderate	Medium	May require funding for industry/community buy-in	Encourages wider system engagement, with concerns noted around unclear value for industry and the risk of GPEx being dominated by RC experts.	Model 2: Peer Convening and Model 3: Capacity-Building (Exchange hub)
Audience – engagement motivations	Literature review evidence - Participation is shaped by varied motivations (funding, prestige, learning and altruism). Tailored incentives can widen engagement and sustain commitment.	Emerging (review evidence)	N/A	May involve costs for recognition, incentives, and communications	Helps avoid over-reliance on 'culture champions.'	Raised in the literature review. FG feedback questioned the value for senior leaders and industry and raised concerns that GPEx might end up serving only research culture experts; a review of the evidence adds that different groups have varied motivations and incentives.

Theme	Agreement	Consensus Strength	Priority	Costing considerations	Notes/conditions	Closest alignment with model (specific elements, if any)
Audience – senior leaders	Leadership activities should be designed to engage senior leaders as visible champions of research culture, demonstrating behaviours that set the tone for their organisations. At the same time, these initiatives must ensure that leadership development does not become the sole focus and that practitioners and mid-career staff have opportunities to develop their own skills and agency to shape culture.	Moderate	Medium	Could require targeted training budgets	Agreement that leaders have influence, but appetite to engage is uncertain and likely to depend on what happens with REF People, Culture and Environment.	Model 2: Peer-Convening (Leadership training)
Delivery mode – grants model	Fully costed grants so participation is feasible (no volunteer labour), matched to light, proportionate application/award processes.	Strong overall, but with some push-back in Warwick, where the cascade funding model was preferred	High	Needs 100% costed participation, not volunteer labour	Seen as legitimate and necessary, with positive comments, though concerns about equity were prominent. Risk that novelty may be prioritised over the exchange of existing practice.	Model 2: Peer-convening (Grants mode delivery)

Theme	Agreement	Consensus Strength	Priority	Costing considerations	Notes/conditions	Closest alignment with model (specific elements, if any)
Delivery mode – cascade funding	Funding mechanisms should include cascade models that allow smaller institutions, specialist organisations and partners across all four nations to participate on fair terms. This would help reduce structural imbalances by preventing resources from being concentrated in larger universities and by widening the capacity for research culture development across the sector.	Moderate	Medium	Requires top-slicing or redistribution mechanisms	Promotes inclusion of smaller organisations	Model 3: Capacity-Building (Immersive/Exchanges and cascade funding)
Delivery – equity in grant processes	Literature review evidence - Grant processes could include lighter-touch applications, targeted calls, or partial randomisation after quality thresholds to reduce inequities.	Emerging (review evidence)	N/A	May require additional administrative resources	Responds to disadvantages faced by smaller institutions and non-HEI actors.	Raised in the literature review. FG feedback highlighted inequities in grant/cascade access; the review of evidence proposes specific mechanisms to address them.
Governance – representation	Broad, accountable governance with transparent theme-setting and reviewer training to ensure credibility and fairness.	Strong	High	Administrative costs for a diverse governance structure	Advisory panels viewed positively	Cross-cutting (Peer convening/capacity)
Leadership – neutral conveners	Neutral convening (learned societies/academies or mixed consortium) to avoid single-institution dominance.	Moderate	Medium	Cost depends on the hosting/coordination model	Seen as more neutral than a single HEI	Model 2 Peer convening (Led by a trusted body, e.g. academies' leadership)

Theme	Agreement	Consensus Strength	Priority	Costing considerations	Notes/conditions	Closest alignment with model (specific elements, if any)
Leadership – shared models	Distributed leadership across partners to spread ownership and resilience.	Moderate	Medium	Costs are spread across partners	Seen as a way to avoid over-reliance on one body and to broaden engagement. However, participants also raised concerns about continuity and coherence if leadership rotates too frequently or lacks a clear coordinating structure.	Hybrid/Distributed leadership (fits cross-model preference)
Ownership – collective	Collaborative ownership of outputs/data with clear permissions and neutrality for hosts (no perceived advantage for hosting).	Strong	High	Shared costs across participating organisations	Seen as aligning with research culture goals	Model 2: Peer-Convening and Model 3: Capacity-Building (distributed exchanges)
Outcomes – system-level	Activities should contribute not only to individual projects but also to wider system change, by generating cross-organisational learning, producing evidence-informed guidance, and building credibility to influence policy. To achieve this, evidence must be synthesised across initiatives in ways that are robust and accessible, and GPEx needs to include mechanisms to transfer learning beyond the original participants.	Strong	High	Costs in evaluation and dissemination	Core purpose of GPEx – unique added value	Model 3: Capacity-Building (learning/exchanges hub) and Model 1: Evidence Hub (evidence credibility)

Theme	Agreement	Consensus Strength	Priority	Costing considerations	Notes/conditions	Closest alignment with model (specific elements, if any)
Outcomes – linkage to R&I objectives	Literature review evidence: Outcomes should demonstrate how culture change contributes to wider R&I goals (funding, policy, investment) and prioritise the replication of effective practice. Alumni networks can provide continuity.	Emerging (review evidence)	N/A	Evaluation costs	Strengthens the credibility of sector outputs and their influence on policy.	Raised in the literature review. FG feedback asked for system-level impact; the review evidence adds explicit linkage to wider R&I goals and emphasises replication rather than novelty.

Based on sector consensus and prioritisation from the matrix, we shortlisted the following activities as potential activities for GPEx:

- Establishing a centrally curated evidence base that brings together examples of what works in different methods, contexts and outcomes, providing a shared point of reference to guide future activity.
- Developing tools for practical evaluation support, such as toolkits, templates and exemplars.
- Providing modular learning opportunities such as workshops, short missions and Challenge Labs, for capacity-building.
- Offering targeted staff exchanges that promote cross-sector learning.
- Lightweight brokering to match needs with expertise, leveraging existing networks rather than building new services.
- Promoting non-competitive recognition (e.g., institutional acknowledgements or profile raising) that legitimises culture work without creating winner-takes-all dynamics.

Project activities in Phase 3 leveraged this shortlist to identify the extent to which the desired activities and outcomes can be operationalised within the available resources.

Annex D. Establishing resource requirements

The final delivery model combined elements of the different models discussed throughout stakeholder engagement activities. To assess the resources required to deliver the proposed GPEx model, we conducted a benchmarking cost modelling exercise. The exercise, involving desk research, interviews, and benchmark cost modelling, helped establish the inputs and resources required to operationalise GPEx. In line with the project Terms of Reference, three scenarios of the delivery model have been developed depending on the level of investment for its setup:

- **A low-budget scenario** where GPEx receives £0.5m funding
- **A medium-budget scenario** where GPEx receives £2.5m
- **A high-budget scenario** where GPEx receives £5m funding.

Activities that are fundamental to addressing core stakeholder priorities, such as evidence synthesis, knowledge exchange and capacity-building, are included in all three scenarios (with varying levels of staff and grant support). Additional peer learning activities, skill exchanges, and grant allocations, such as mentoring sessions and cross-sector exchanges, have been scaled up in medium- and high-scenario settings, depending on resource availability. Thus, costs are aggregated across levels – the medium-budget scenario is modelled as a combination of all activities feasible at the low and medium budgets. The high-budget scenario is similarly an aggregation of cost lines from the low- and medium-budget scenarios, along with new activities unique to the highest budget.

This section presents results from different components of the cost modelling exercise, moving from governance and organisational structures to year-on-year cost profiles.

D.1. Governance and administrative structure

Using outcomes and activities shortlisted from previous phases, we identified existing practice exchange initiatives whose structures and operational experiences could offer valuable insights for the design of GPEx. Examples of identified organisations include centres in the What Works Network, NCCPE, Science Europe, Local Policy Innovation Partnerships, European Cooperation in Science and Technology, Open Science Monitoring Initiative, UK Evaluation Society, N8, European Evaluation Society and Early Career Researcher Network. A third round of desk research was conducted to review common processes for governance, decision making and wider engagement within these organisations. We summarise these below:

- **Governance:** In most instances, decision making involved a small team of senior leaders, supported by specialists (e.g. evaluation lead) and an external advisory committee. Additional sub-committees

are established for targeted purposes such as organisational culture and risk management. Participation as sub-committee and advisory board members is usually voluntary, with remuneration to cover expenses. Some organisations also have an upper limit on the amount of expenses covered.

- **Mechanisms for engagement:** Organisations commonly establish a committee or team to oversee the production of guidance and toolkits, providing systematic pathways for members to share input on their development. Creation of sub-groups based on the purpose of engagement (e.g. capacity-building, networking or evidence sharing) was also used to drive engagement based on members' interests. Including members in advisory panels and mailing lists, and appointing a membership officer to foster connectivity among participants, were other mechanisms implemented. In some instances, organisations created regional sub-groups that were limited to England, and engagement with devolved nations was less prevalent.
- **Strategic leadership:** While processes for strategic leadership were less common in organisations, when present, they included specialist tools, one-to-one coaching, and guides to support leaders in implementing new and effective approaches or initiatives.

We reviewed financial evidence from the same organisations to build relevant cost categories for the modelling exercise. The goal was to understand how practice exchange programmes allocate their budgets, make funding decisions and present their budgets to funders and auditors. Their common ways of classifying expenditure, allocating overheads and distributing activity versus operational spend informed subsequent interviews in this phase.

D.2. Cost profiles

We combined findings from the third round of desk research with interviews with four financial experts from similar practice exchange initiatives. Quantitative evidence from desk research and interview-based sources was compared and harmonised to calculate the per-unit cost of each activity and the resource needs. For example, annual expenditure on office space and rent was calculated by averaging expenses reported by other organisations in the desk research, normalised by their number of FTEs. Interviewees similarly provided staff roles and capacities required to implement different activities. Each interviewee presented a different but comparable governance and delivery structure, providing indicative cost data on their budgetary allocations.

The goal of this exercise was to translate these insights into numerical parameters that can directly inform the GPEx cost profile. Some numerical parameters include the percentage spent on overheads, grants, and governance. For example, indirect costs or overheads for website development and maintenance, office space and rent, audit and legal services, IT subscriptions, and an external evaluation budget have been included in the model.

By embedding these external figures into the GPEx model, we ensure that its cost scenarios reflect the typical resource distributions across similar initiatives, making the outputs both credible and comparable. It helped ensure that costs calculated for relevant inputs were grounded in real-world spending patterns rather than purely theoretical assumptions. The evidence contributed to the development of three budget scenarios,

underscoring their implications for the shortlisted activities and the extent to which they align with GPEx's desired outcomes and core values.

D.3. Results from modelled budget scenarios

The cost model for GPEx was designed to make trade-offs visible. Each cost line in the model is assigned to one of three budget levels: low (£0.5m), medium (£2.5m) and high (£5m). As described in the following sections, the model helps visualise what is gained or lost when moving between the three levels.

D.3.1. Core model features

The model leverages the principles identified for GPEx in Phase 1 (see Box 8) to align costs with GPEx's central values where possible. As a result, the model is built around the characteristics described below.

First, **funding for participants and staff roles is crucial to achieving the added value envisioned by** GPEx. Financial support offered through different programmes within GPEx would support the R&I community's involvement and activity on research culture change. However, stakeholders perceive GPEx not only as a grant-making body but also as an initiative that builds coherence across the community on research culture agendas. This could be achieved by allocating staff roles to ensure alignment of activities within and beyond GPEx. Similarly, some model scenarios include staff allocation for external engagement, which is essential for building the role and relevance of GPEx within the wider R&I community and for securing follow-on support to sustain its activities.

Second, while project teams within GPEx are constituted voluntarily, the model takes into account stakeholders' concerns regarding barriers to participation, especially for underrepresented and under-resourced groups. As a result, participation grants allocate **financial support** covering time for 10% of members in a project team in the low scenario to 30–40% of project team members in the medium- and high-budget scenarios.

Other methodological features of the model include:

- Annual salaries for staff roles are increased each year from 2026 to 2030 in line with the Office for Budget Responsibility's consumer price index forecasts (2025). Salaries also include employer on-costs such as national insurance contributions.
- Venues for in-person activities are provided in kind by organisations in the delivery consortium, but catering and travel costs are included in the model. Annual costs for governance, monitoring, audits, and reporting are also calculated in the model.
- Travel expenses incurred for in-person activities are covered for all participants, using a flat, inflation-adjusted reimbursement rate in the medium and high scenarios. At the low-budget level, expenses are covered for 30% of participants.

Table 12 below presents results from some of the numerical parameters used in the cost modelling exercise.

Table 12. Results on key costing parameters from all three scenarios

Parameter	Low-budget scenario	Medium-budget scenario	High-budget scenario
Total FTEs	3.66 FTE	9.80 FTE	15.26 FTE
Total comms support	0.32 FTE	1.05 FTE	1.62 FTE
Total staff costs	£ 229,381	£ 870,307.9	£ 1,367,337.4
Staff costs as % of total costs	46%	35%	27%
Grant costs	£ 24,200	£ 384,800	£ 2,147,800
Grant costs as % of total costs	5%	15%	43%
Non-Staff Costs	£ 126,393	£ 477,785	£ 629,523
Non-Staff costs as % of total costs	25%	19%	13%
Overheads as % of total costs	25%	19%	13%
Investment in knowledge generation and sharing	£ 78,575	£ 837,246.5	£ 2,053,831.6
Investment in Skill exchange and capacity-building	£ 54,979.8	£ 335,392.3	£ 1,376,341.2
Investment in Access and Equity	£ 143,371.4	£ 404,921.8	£ 559,266.8
Investment in governance	£103, 047.8	£ 154,978.8	£ 154,978.8

D.3.2. Organisational structure

In line with the governance structure outlined in the final report, this section provides further details on the composition of the Executive Team and their roles. The team is responsible for providing managerial and specialist support for all activities implemented within GPEx. To achieve this, the following staff roles and responsibilities have been proposed in the cost model:

- **Director:** Responsible for driving engagement towards GPEx by establishing and strengthening the initiative's external partnerships with other UK R&I and policy actors.
- **Organisational leads:** Representatives from partner organisations in the delivery consortium who form part of the Programme Board, oversee the Executive Team and provide mentorship to participants.
- **Programme Manager:** Operational responsibility for implementing GPEx by maintaining internal coordination and day-to-day delivery.
- **Admin coordinators:** Up to two assistants who provide administrative support to most GPEx activities and organise cross-programme learning activities for members.
- **Comms officer:** Responsible for website design, development, updates and strategic communication on the role and outputs from GPEx, also providing support to member-led activities.
- **Evaluation Lead:** Establishing monitoring and evaluation timelines for GPEx, with overall responsibility for evidence synthesis, curation and development of tools for supporting member-

led evaluations. The Evaluation Lead is not an independent evaluator but rather leads the delivery of the evaluation-related activities under GPEx.

- **Evaluation Officer:** Collaborates with project teams with the Evaluation Lead's guidance to synthesise evidence and develop tools.
- **Independent evaluator:** An external consultant to conduct the developmental evaluation of GPEx simultaneously.

Since these staff roles are involved to varying degrees in activities, the level of managerial and specialist support offered by the Executive Team differs across the three scenarios. Two administrative coordinators are included in the medium- and high-budget scenarios, whereas in the low-budget scenario, their responsibilities are combined into a single role. Table 13 below summarises variations in the model in terms of the average FTEs assigned to staff roles per year.

Table 13. Average staff FTE per year by budget scenario

Staff role	Average FTE by budget scenario			Implications
	High	Medium	Low	
Director	0.12	0.10	0.04	Reduced support for external engagement activities in the low-budget scenario, impacting the extent to which GPEx engages with other R&I initiatives and policy actors.
Organisational leads	0.26	0.19	0.10	Scope for mentorship and guidance is reduced, decreasing organisational leads' involvement as advisors in different project teams.
Programme Manager	0.68	0.36	0.14	Lower managerial support in the low- and medium-scenario scenarios, and the absence of a second admin coordinator in the low-budget scenario, affect participants' access to facilitation and cross-programme learning activities.
Admin Coordinator 1	0.89	0.53	0.26	
Admin Coordinator 2	0.96	0.57	0	
Comms Officer	0.32	0.23	0.06	R&I stakeholders' access to GPEx is affected, also limiting an external-facing narrative of the initiative's impacts and added value, as the comms strategy would highlight GPEx's contributions in the sector
Evaluation Lead	0.15	0.13	0.10	Costs allocated to evaluation staff remain similar between the high- and medium-budget scenarios but decrease by 23–52% in the low scenario. This leads to scaling down of activities most prioritised by the sector.
Evaluation Officer	0.29	0.23	0.11	

The following sections disaggregate the created model into its annual sub-components, highlighting how the proposed activities evolve over time and across the budget scenarios.

D.3.3. Annualised costing

The Terms of Reference for this project propose a maximum five-year period for the first investment into GPEx. Since inputs and the implementation of different core and learning activities would vary across years, the three model scenarios are created annually.

Year 1

The goal is to establish a foundation for GPEx to leverage, securing buy-in from key stakeholders through involvement in goal-setting and the development of standards for good practice in research culture. The model would achieve this by establishing a 10-person project team to co-develop **principles for culture change** with the R&I community. While the project team is established in all scenarios, the level of managerial and dissemination support from the Executive team staff varies depending on the budget.[12] In the low-budget scenario, GPEx can also dedicate £12,500 to co-development grants to support participation in the co-development project team; in the medium-budget scenario, GPEx can dedicate £ 12,500 to co-development grants to support participation in the co-development project team. The allocation for co-development grants doubles to £25,000 in the high-budget scenario.[13]

Year 2

Year 2 is focused on establishing stronger evidence and evaluation support, ensuring common training support that can be leveraged from Year 3 onwards. To achieve this, a budget has been allocated to evaluation staff within the Executive Team to curate and synthesise existing evidence on culture change, resulting in a digital resource library. A new ten-person Evaluation Project Team also guides the **creation of practical toolkits and guides** for members requiring assistance with, or those new to, the assessment of culture change approaches. Except in the low-budget scenario, the model allocates £12,500 (medium) to £25,000 (high) to small grants for members to develop toolkits. In addition, the high-budget scenario provides for evaluation drop-in sessions where participants can ask for mentorship from evaluation staff in the Executive Team and the Evaluation Project Team on a rotational basis.

The theme of skill exchange and capacity-building is a priority in Year 2 as GPEx also launches its first year of workshops and online and in-person trainings. Member-led **modular training activities** would receive communication and managerial support from the Executive team, as well as mentorship from the Programme Board to ensure coherence and alignment with wider priorities. These learning activities have been summarised in Table 14 below.

[12] In the low-budget scenario, 0.11 FTE of the Executive Team is assigned to this exercise, compared to 0.125 FTE in the medium- and 0.49 FTE in the high-budget scenarios. One example of variation in the low-budget scenario includes reduced involvement of the Comms officer in dissemination activities.

[13] Note: all investment figures quoted in this section refer to amount of funding available in total rather than amount awarded per grant.

Table 14. The modular learning opportunities offered in each budget scenario

Modular learning opportunities	Low	Medium	High
Member-led workshops	Annual member-led workshop through a small grant: • £2,000 allocated as grant costs	Member-led workshops every two months through small grants: • £12,000 allocated as grant costs	
Online training	One online training session (0.5 day) each year	Quarterly programme of online trainings	Frequency increases to every two months
In-person training	No in-person training	One in-person training each year for up to 15 participants	

Towards the end of Year 2, four **thematic sandpits** are formed in the low- and medium-budget scenarios. At the highest budget level, the number of sandpits increases to six. The extent of the Executive Team's involvement in facilitating cross-sandpit learning varies across scenarios in subsequent years. For example, in Years 3–5, in the low-budget scenario, the variation is reflected in the absence of a second admin coordinator who facilitates engagement among members in the medium and high scenarios.

Year 3

In Year 3, the emphasis is on knowledge sharing and partnerships as sandpits become more active. In the low-budget scenario, sandpit members are limited to online engagement, whereas the model in the medium- and high-budget scenarios can cover travel for an in-person meet. Similarly, the availability of resources in the medium- and high-budget scenarios enables GPEx to allocate funding for sandpit members:

- A total of £120,000–180,000 is allocated to Knowledge Exchange (KE) grants in the medium- and high-budget scenarios, respectively. These are awarded to sandpits with the flexibility to conduct activities of their choosing and in the order they choose (e.g. a training or a cross-sector exchange programme). No grants are awarded in the low budget.
- A total of £36,000–120,000 for evaluation grants in the medium- and high-budget scenarios, respectively. The funding would enable members to assess existing culture change approaches and generate evidence of their transferability across contexts. No grants are awarded in the low-budget scenario.

Across all three scenarios, sandpit participants are invited to in-person challenge labs where they can propose, experiment with, and advocate for novel solutions to a prescribed research culture issue within their theme. In the high-budget scenario, the model also launches a skills exchange programme, allocating £300,000 to fixed-term fellowships that encourage cross-sector peer learning. Digital resource library and toolkits from Year 2 are also updated with new evidence this year, but no grants are made in all budget scenarios. The model also maintains modular learning opportunities and evaluation drop-in sessions in Year 2, except for evaluation workshops, which are absent in the low scenario.

Year 4

In Year 4, the model's focus shifts to reflect more on the progress made in the first three years. Sandpits are reconvened to learn from members' experiences in Year 3 and to decide priorities for the coming year. At the highest budget level, GPEx builds on this reflection period by supporting a second round of co-development (similar to Year 1 but without the grants). Funding is also allocated in Year 4 for different purposes. For example, a Pilot Fund is proposed in the high-budget scenario with £120,000 investment to further develop and disseminate effective ideas from Year 3 challenge labs:

- **Knowledge generation and sharing:** Sandpit members receive managerial, communication and financial support to develop activities for Year 4. KE Grants are again allocated, limited to £20,000 in the low-budget scenario, £120,000 in the medium and £180,000 in the high. These are supplemented with evaluation grants (£120,000) in the high-budget scenario and updates to the digital resource library across all scenarios.
- **Skills exchange and capacity-building:** The Skills exchange programme is reconstituted in the highest budget scenarios with a £300,000 allocation. Modular training activities mirror the frequency established in Year 2 (see Table 14). A further £10,000 (medium) to £20,000 (high) is allocated for member-led development of new evaluation toolkits.

Year 5

Year 5 brings people together to explore next steps, synthesise future ideas and strengthen collaborations. Thematic sandpits and Challenge Labs are reconvened in Year 5, but not in the low-budget scenario. Access to the Pilot Fund (£120,000 allocation) and KE Grants (£180,000) is restricted to the high-budget scenario in Year 5:

- **Knowledge generation and sharing:** KE grants (£180,000 allocation) are available only in the highest budget scenario, but evaluation grants are reinstated in Year 5 with £36,000 and £120,000 allocated in the medium- and high-budget scenarios, respectively. Digital resource library and toolkits are updated in Year 5, but no grants are made across all scenarios.
- **Skills exchange and capacity-building:** The skills exchange programme continues in the high-budget scenario with the same allocation. In the medium-budget scenario, GPEx offers some managerial support for staff exchanges, but participation is voluntary. Online and in-person training and evaluation drop-in sessions are conducted as usual, but there are no member-led workshops across all budget scenarios.

More broadly, year-on-year cost profiles highlight how GPEx activities would evolve, moving from the identification of shared priorities to practical support tools that build evaluation capacity, and knowledge and skill exchange mechanisms through modular pathways from Year 2. The cost model also provides flexible financial support to upscale novel solutions emerging from GPEx activities (e.g. through the Challenge Lab Pilot Fund).

The next section discusses the wider implications of the variations observed between the three budget scenarios.

D.3.4. Implications

As described in the final report, the cost modelling exercise revealed that an investment of at least £2.5 million is required to operationalise the shortlisted activities and achieve desired outcomes from GPEx. In the model scenario at the lowest budget, activities are substantially scaled back due to reduced staff and grant allocations. For example, the model in the low-budget scenario would allocate 94% fewer grants, affecting the extent to which GPEx activities and outputs can be sustained amid other resource constraints within the R&I sector. In many cases, the low-budget scenario also contradicts values central to GPEx, as it provides fewer participation grants and travel reimbursements to a small proportion of participants and fails to cover many overhead costs, such as infrastructure and IT support. In addition, while a developmental evaluation could be commissioned for at least three years of the model in the medium-budget scenario, the low-budget scenario relies on informal feedback loops and minimal pathways for participant reflections.

On the other hand, the high-budget scenario would enable GPEx to comprehensively address many gaps in the existing research culture, as described above. It would also support the initiative's contributions to wider government R&I priorities such as cross-sector learning and impact-driven change.

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