Concordat and Agreements Review Appendices

Appendix A: Stages 1-3 rationale and the culture-centric approach

Overall initiative and user feedback from Stages 1-3[1] was positive where both welcomed the bringing together of initiatives through closer communication, alignment and streamlining to benefit research culture.

A key message from users was that the current situation is not sustainable and that change is very much needed. Selected feedback quotes include:

- *"Vital for ensuring a joined-up approach to creating a positive culture"*
- *"a great opportunity to bring the initiatives together, which drive how we work to change culture"*
- *"[Would be great to see this implemented]...rather than it evaporate because it's difficult"*

A detailed summary of the positive feedback and potential challenges and/or negatives, which were raised at workshops 1 and 2, are shown in Appendix C – Stage 2: and Appendix D- Stage 3.
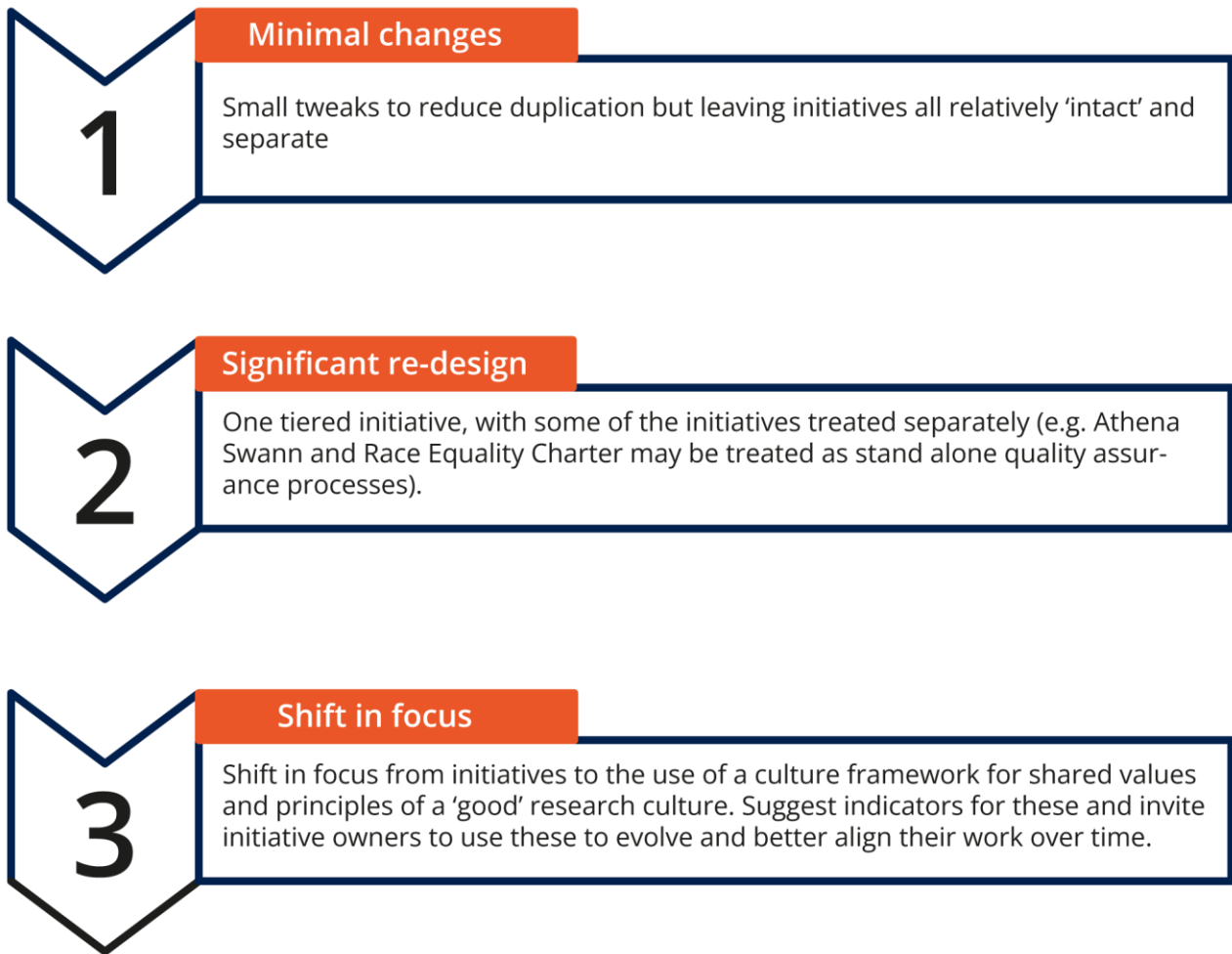
In this Appendix, we provide further detail regarding our rationale and what we mean by moving to a more culture-centric approach to research culture.

Level of ambition

As with any such project, one can vary the level of ambition for the outcome or proposed solution. To this end, we formulated several ideas of varying levels of ambition (see Figure 1), ranging from minimal changes, to something much more radical and ambitious that, in our view, would better fulfil the strong aspirations expressed in the bureaucracy review,**Error! Bookmark not defined.** R&D People & Culture Strategy**Error! Bookmark not defined.**, and importantly by the initiative owners during their interviews with us and in phase I.

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[1] This feedback was received from the semi-structured interviews (Stage 1) and stakeholder engagement workshops (Stage 2; initiative users and Stage 3; users and initiative owners).

Figure 1: Different levels of ambition tested with users and initiative owners.

1 **Minimal changes**

Small tweaks to reduce duplication but leaving initiatives all relatively 'intact' and separate

2 **Significant re-design**

One tiered initiative, with some of the initiatives treated separately (e.g. Athena Swann and Race Equality Charter may be treated as stand alone quality assurance processes).

3 **Shift in focus**

Shift in focus from initiatives to the use of a culture framework for shared values and principles of a 'good' research culture. Suggest indicators for these and invite initiative owners to use these to evolve and better align their work over time.

## Shifting from an initiative-centric approach to a culture-centric approach

We have called the current approach for how initiatives support HEI/ROs, initiative-centric, as it consists of largely separate initiatives, drawing on different data, people, timescales and reporting requirements to address different aspects which collectively make up positive research culture and environment (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Current initiative-centric approach.
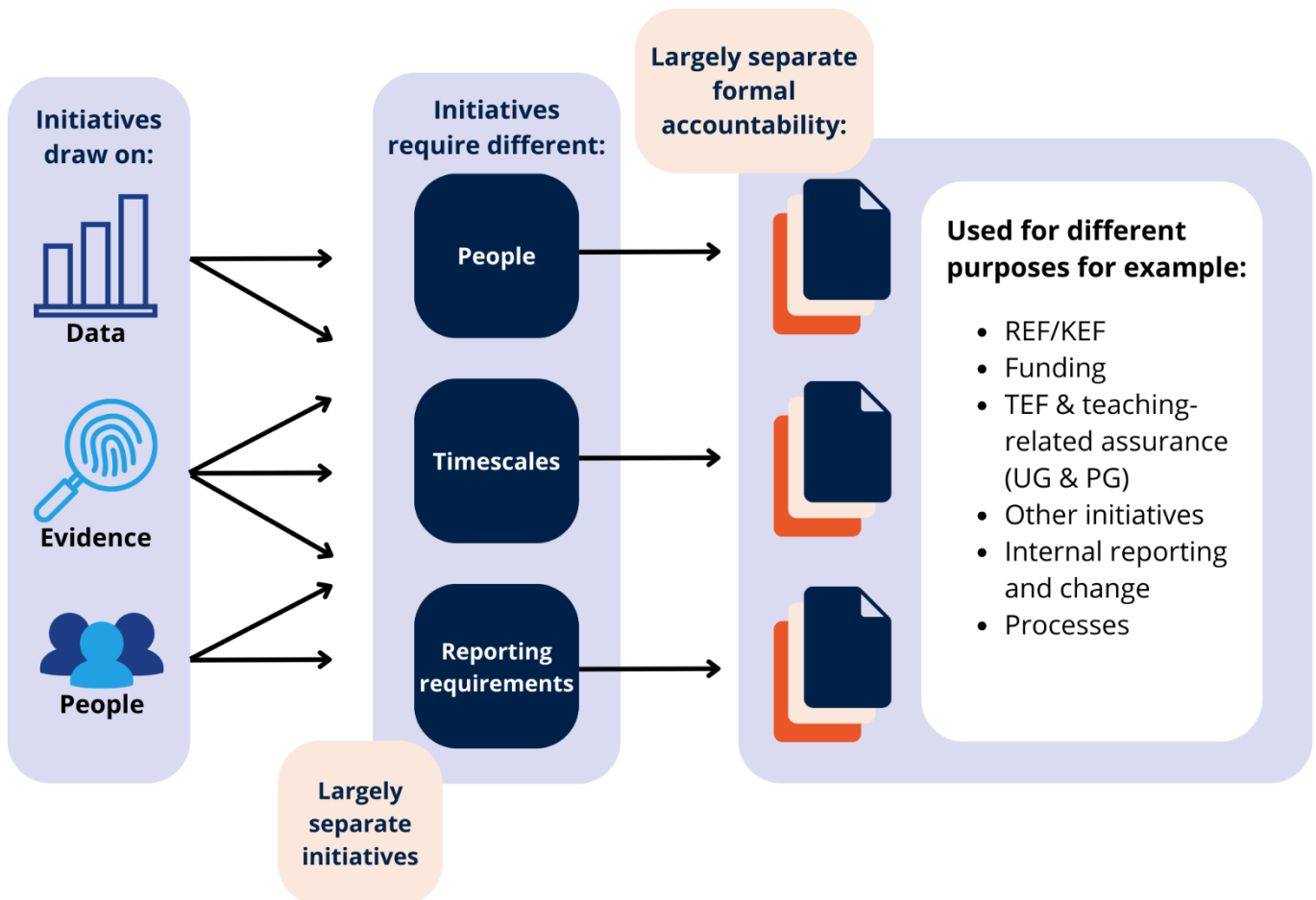
We proposed to change the initiative-centric approach to a culture-centric approach (see Figure 3). The culture-centric approach positions research culture as the core focus, inviting initiatives to align as primarily formative instruments to positively impact research culture, making these connections explicit.

Figure 3: Proposed culture-centric approach to place research culture as the core focus and show clearly how each initiative supports the different research culture values.
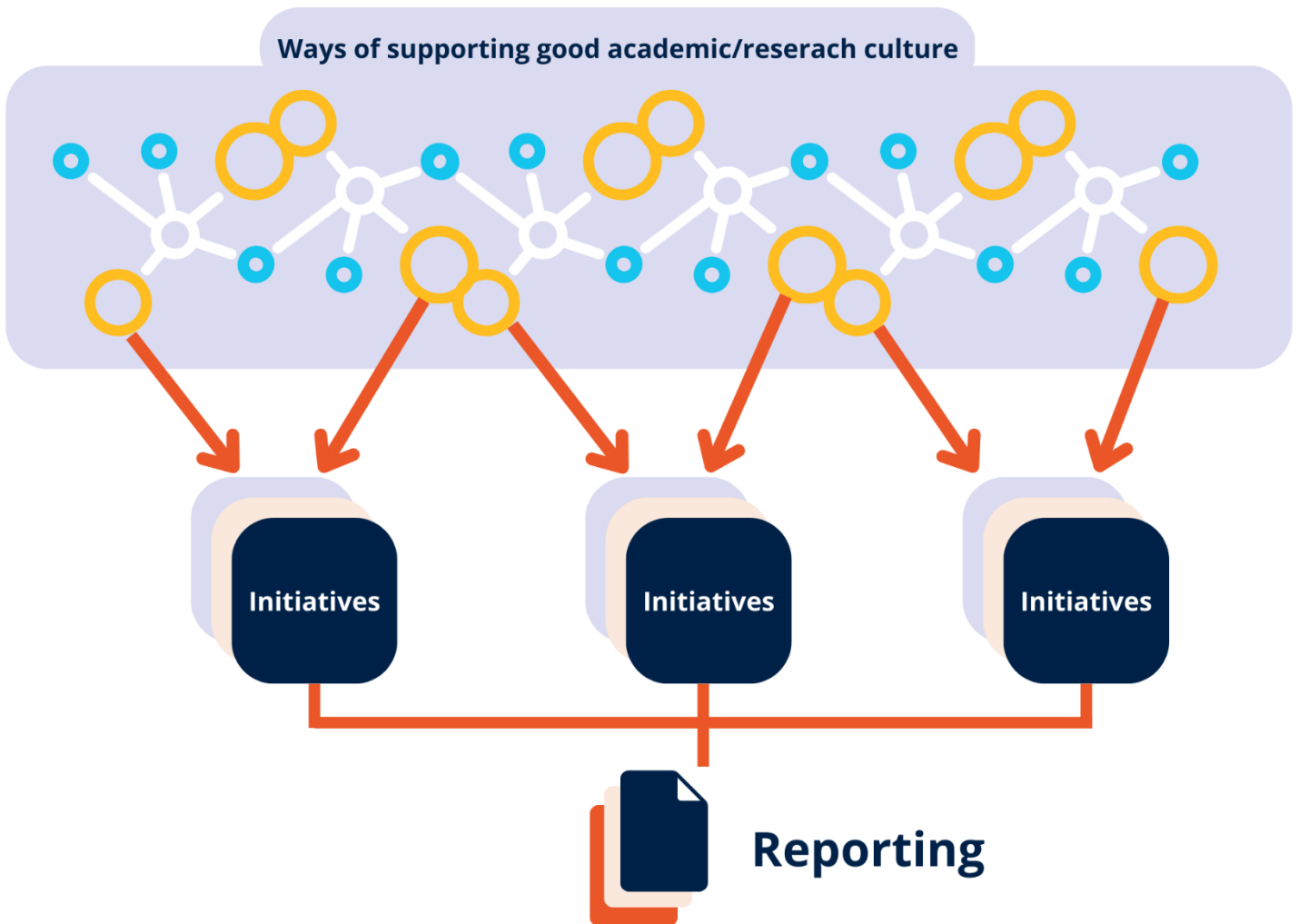
In the culture-centric approach (the basis of the proposed solution), the research culture values would be defined using an existing research culture framework and the initiatives mapped to these. The culture-centric approach will therefore show clearly where and how each supports a particular research culture area. In contrast to the current initiative reporting requirements, which are separate for each initiative, the culture-centric approach proposes a single reporting process, centred around the research culture values, with single periodic summative assessment which would be aligned to other uses (for example, alignment with REF environment statements could be explored).

Appendix B - Stage 1: Initiative owner feedback

This appendix provides a high-level summary of outputs from interviews held with initiative owners as part of Stage 1. We have also detailed here the design of the initial proposed solution, which was then tested and iterated via workshops.

Initiative owner interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with initiative owners from eleven of the twelve initiatives. The interviews were held in August 2022. Each was approximately one hour in duration and covered:

- The policy context and motivations for creating the initiative
- Activities which initiatives are currently or plan to initiate which may be a relevance to the phase II concordat and agreements review
- Ideas around ways to reduce burden on institutions from for example initiatives individually or collectively
- Ways to increase the capacity and/or influence of their initiative
- Issues, sensitivities and opportunities which may be present with the process of exploring harmonisation or alignment of initiatives.

Key findings and conclusions

Feedback gathered during the interviews is summarised below.

Agreement to streamline, align and remove duplication

- Initiative owners welcomed more communication and interaction with other initiatives to explore overlap and alignment and where streamlining and/or alignment of reporting cycles could benefit the sector and reduce burden and duplication felt by institutions. Initiative owners were also collectively in agreement that close communication with HEIs and ROs, at multiple stakeholder levels, will be required during streamlining and/or alignment.
- Users of the initiatives are typically HEIs and ROs, however some initiatives do not seek to influence organisations within the HE and R&I sector directly, or place demands on them, rather, these initiatives focus on funders and government. However, regardless of the user group, initiative owners all saw value in positioning their work more thoughtfully alongside the other initiatives.

Stakeholder engagement and impact measurement concerns

- A number of initiative owners expressed concern with the lack of awareness of their initiative amongst researchers and research enablers, and that this is something very important to address, and formulate a solution for, going forwards.
- Almost all initiative owners said that they struggled with impact measurement and progress, and welcomed the sharing of learning and approaches both around progress reviews but also more generally.

Initiative owners supported the idea to use a culture framework

- There was support for the idea to use a culture framework of some type, although no-one was quite sure what this would or should look like. However, some initiatives have

already started to think about how they may be able to reduce their burden on institutions and started streamlining efforts, and are keen to share their learnings.

Diversity of initiatives and their stakeholders

- What was striking was the diversity in for example approaches, breadth, reach and stakeholders between each initiative. For some, this review as part of phase II, was welcomed as it was seen as an opportunity to reinvigorate their initiative or perhaps even to be subsumed into a wider area covered by a different initiative. For others however, they perceived significant risk of their initiative's activities being 'lost' or diluted as part of the process of closer alignment and streamlining.

Overall, regardless of whether the initiative owner felt it would be beneficial to the HE and R&I sector or their initiative for harmonisation, they all saw value and expressed enthusiasm in bringing the initiatives closer together.

Interview feedback

This section describes themes and trends which originated from our interviews with initiative owners.

Initiative creation and motivations

We asked each interviewee to describe when and how their initiative was created and the motivations behind it. We found out that:

- Three out of the eleven initiatives have a global focus, with the remaining eight focusing on a mainly UK audience.
- There exist a variety of business models, some are charities, one is entirely voluntary and relies on funding from grants and another runs as a not-for-profit business. In addition, some organisations manage and run more than one initiative.[2]

Initiatives were all created in response to an unmet need

In terms of the motivation for their creation, all initiatives were set up in response to demand or a need identified by either the HE and R&I sector itself or funding bodies.

- Initiatives were typically found to be created in response to a body of evidence, gathered and presented within a report or at an event in which many stakeholders came together, identified an unmet need, and then set about to change things for the better.
- The beneficiaries and users for each of the initiatives are either a distinct community or group of research and research enablers, or a wider community consisting of multiple stakeholders at different levels and encompassing all roles within HEIs and ROs.
- Putting to one side the global nature of three of the initiatives, interviewees typically described their target audience(s), or users, either as stakeholders within HEIs and ROs and/or UK funders.

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[2] Not all initiatives have secure long-term funding, and are typically run by small teams, often with limited resources.

How initiatives have changed since their creation

The year in which each initiative was established can be found in the Concordat and Agreements review phase I report, however we asked the eleven initiative owners to describe whether their initiative had changed since its creation.

- For the newly formed initiatives, it is still early days and they reported encouraging interest and engagement so far.
- More established initiatives, described how their initiative had become more embedded over the years and others noted how the landscape had changed since inception and their drive to expand internationally or/and the reach of the initiative by adapting for other broad subject areas.

Any changes must uphold the purpose of the initiatives

Some transient changes, which impacted on a few initiatives, were those driven by funding bodies on making a particular initiative a requirement of funding eligibility. Initiative owners unanimously were not in favour of their initiative being a prerequisite for funding, even though it did increase applications and significantly raise the profile of the initiative in the short term.

- Initiative owners described the purpose of their initiative as being to enhance and support HE and R&I, and all stakeholders (within the sector and who are impacted by it), to uphold their responsibilities around equality, diversity and inclusion, research conduct and working practices, staff development, and assessment and evaluation.
- Initiative owners all wanted to avoid HEIs and ROs signing up to their initiative due to necessity, as there is a risk that signatories may in fact not be able to fulfil or commit in practice.
- Initiative owners stressed that the purpose of the initiatives is not to act in an 'enforcer' role, but to support and help HEIs/ROs by providing guidelines on good practice, case studies and/or other offerings. Initiative owners indicated that they would rather encourage institutions by for example changing the language around their initiative,[3] or updating to keep up with changing landscapes and emerging concepts.[4] It is also worth noting that periodic reviews are undertaken for several of the initiatives, and that some had already initiated work to consider burden, potential overlaps, and streamlining at the time of these interviews.

Mechanisms for information capture

All initiatives are aspiring to continue to generate energy, momentum and enthusiasm and raise the profile of their initiative's focus area to make a sustainable and impactful positive difference to HEIs/ROs and their stakeholders (including importantly the beneficiaries).

We asked interviewees what an 'excellent outcome' would be for their initiative. Answers varied as expected based on the focus and purpose of each. One initiative owner said that if their

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[3] Such as for example, wording changes from 'should do', to 'must do' in response to an increase in bullying and harassment.

[4] Such as broadening definitions in line with technological advancement.

initiative was not needed anymore, because good practice and momentum to maintain and keep progressing good practice was reached, then this would be the ultimate 'excellent outcome'.

- Initiatives strive to drive change through encouraging self-assessment and self-reflection by HEIs and ROs, providing feedback and support to them which will result not in a 'bad score' or the negative effects of competitive rivalry with other HEIs/ROs. Instead initiative owners expressed how they wanted to foster the right culture and good practice sharing, and even highlight opportunities for partnerships between institutions for mutual benefit.

The ways in which initiatives indicated that they gathered (and also sometimes disseminated) information included[5]:

- Networks and conversations with individual contacts within HEIs and ROs
- Evidence of training, funding, rewards and recognition at the HEI/RO which support initiative focused activities i.e. as evidence of degree of embedding in that institution
- Internal (to the initiative) funding assurance processes
- HEI/RO action plans with evaluation and feedback provided and also gathered from member participating HEIs/ROs
- Through creation of a community of shared interest to celebrate good practice
- Using narrative CVs
- Confidential and private communications with individual HEIs/ROs to support them in developing a plan for change or making sure they are meeting the objectives of the initiative
- Qualitative evidence from conversations with initiative HEI/RO members on how taking part has improved the way they work
- Feedback from the initiative's training and support provision offering(s)

Challenges surrounding information capture

Almost all initiative owners indicated they had experienced or were experiencing challenges or unknowns around either data gathering, defining what data to gather to evidence impact, or/and difficulty in general with understanding the impact of their initiative. For example some cited:

- Challenges around capacity to evaluate impact and evidence, for example wanting to hold an event for HEI/RO stakeholders to network and share good practice, case studies, challenges, to really generate a community of shared interest. However they did not have internal capacity to support such an offering.
- Uncertainty around when it was best to gather data e.g. pre-application stage versus (or and) at the peer review/evaluation stage. At least two initiatives mentioned their need (and priority currently) to develop a standardised template for reporting to capture data to inform impact evaluation and evidencing. At least one initiative cited challenges with

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[5] Note that not all initiatives gather information using every method listed.

reaching and engaging with the research and research enabler stakeholders, and that they were difficult to access.

Initiatives and their cycles of operation

We asked initiative owners to describe the current state of their initiative in terms of planned cycles of operation, important milestones or up-coming/current reviews and changes over the next 12-18 months. We found that:

- Not all operate in cycles however most maintain meetings, governance and a basic structure.
- Almost half of the initiative owners described changes which were occurring currently, such as cycle re-development, re-writing of strategies, changes to governance structures, launch of a new framework, and exploring the possibility of a combined equalities culture framework (and the international interest which exists for this).

Alignment of initiatives

The Bureaucracy review**Error! Bookmark not defined.** talks about *'an incremental growth of bureaucracy – over time, new assurance requirements have been introduced. However, few attempts have been made to remove or reduce redundant assurance requirements'*. We asked interviewees their thoughts on how and whether their initiative aligns with other initiatives or in the wider research culture and environment space.

- Many mentioned the importance that they have placed, and steps made or are currently making, to streamline their data gathering, reporting requirements and application forms to reduce the burden on HEIs and ROs.
- Initiative owners commented that they liked the idea of using a culture framework and/or having much more in-depth alignment, including a description of what initiatives should be providing for HEIs and ROs. Another thought that the initiatives should be presented collectively to HEIs/ROs with the relationships between the initiatives defined clearly.
- At least four initiative owners described the administrative burden of their initiative as low, and this was due to for example data being gathered from publicly available sources by that particular initiative and acknowledging significant diversity of HEIs/ROs and using language to reflect this.

One particular initiative owner succinctly described a sentiment which was expressed throughout all the interviews:

"What we need to do is just make sure that we're enabling and supporting our members to devote their energy and their efforts in the right place."

'Pain points' of initiatives for HEIs and ROs

We asked initiative owners to indicate what 'pain points' they experienced or were aware of for HEIs/ROs using their initiative. Initiative owners provided a number of pain points which they envisaged either were currently a challenge and being addressed, something which they had considered and mitigated against during initiative planning, or, which they surmised could potentially be a pain point:

- Burden for implementation of an initiative may be high, and similarly the reporting burden was thought to be most significant for smaller HEIs and ROs.

- How the initiative is implemented was cited by one initiative as a 'pain point' for HEIs and ROs and reflected that the initiative needed to understand how they can support HEIs/ROs to better implement their initiative, whilst accommodating for the diversity of HEIs and ROs.

- Initiatives currently ask for information from HEIs/ROs in different ways and/or formats with each initiative slightly different. This means HEIs and ROs have to put resource into amending and/or redrafting/analysing data to re-purpose.

- Culture and resource were considered two important factors to drive change. For example although researchers and/or research enablers may be entitled to, say, ten days of professional development time, this does not always happen in practice.

- The timing of initiative reporting cycles was identified as a pain point. One potential solution, which was expressed a number of times during interviews, was to collectively explore the initiative cycles (taking into account other significant cycles of a HEI/RO such as REF) to identify areas where burden could be reduced, by for example by shifting deadlines.

- One initiative owner explained that they had found a delicate balance between maintaining confidentiality of individual HEI/RO self-evaluations, ensuring a transparent and open process, but at the same time not losing honesty in the evaluation. This factor was considered to also potentially impact or hinder sharing of good practice between HEIs and ROs.

Overall

Almost all initiative owners expressed interest in closer alignment and opportunities to share and learn from each other through the sharing of longitudinal data (for example i.e. outcomes related to culture). Initiatives had not previously carried out analysis into overlap and/or whether duplication of information gathering was an issue for HEIs/ROs, however the initiative owners expressed that they were open to reducing duplication of information gathered, should this exist, between initiatives. In addition, at least one initiative owner suggested that there was a need to understand the burden placed on HEIs/ROs in more detail and to share approaches across initiatives through more deliberate dialogue.

It should be noted however, that some initiatives already reference, or take into consideration, other initiatives within their framework/guidance for institutions.

A challenge to alignment and awareness of other initiative offerings, which was expressed by more than one initiative, was the limited resource available to consider and analyse the alignment of their initiative with others.

Some initiatives expressed a desire to use existing data, such as HESA and a portal through which HEIs and ROs could download relevant application and information, and then also use this portal for reporting. The challenge with this idea (and concern voiced from HEI/RO feedback later on in phase II) was ensuring that these submissions reflect each HEI/RO accurately.

In terms of how to maximise initiative impact on research culture at HEIs/ROs, initiative owners gave examples including:

- Suggestion for pre-existing instruments to include indicators/measures of research culture, inequalities and behaviours, to incentivise and change behaviour
- Reduction of signatory 'deliverable' requirements to encourage more participation
- The importance to obtain HEI/RO senior leadership buy-in, with one initiative concerned that they have lost this at present and needed to find a way to reinvigorate and generate momentum again against specific outcomes

Key stakeholders and beneficiaries of the initiatives

We asked initiative owners to explain who their key users and beneficiaries are and whether they seek feedback on the initiative process from any or all of these stakeholders.

Interestingly, some of the initiatives did not actually interact with the beneficiaries i.e. those within the HEI/RO who would feel the effects of changes in research culture and equality. Others focused on interacting with the beneficiaries of their initiative, but cited 'begrudging acceptance' from other stakeholders within the HEI/RO. The majority of initiatives interacted with senior stakeholders within HEIs/ROs, for example VC/PVC,DVC and/or heads of innovation (or EDI) and/or departments. Depending on the initiative purpose, the stakeholder group within each HEI and/or RO varied significantly with one initiative explaining that it was the HEI/RO that decided who was in the 'self-assessment team' with which they interacted.

Some initiatives highlighted the 'multi-levelled' nature of their stakeholders, ranging from professional staff within the HEI/RO (e.g. knowledge exchange (KE) professionals, library, IT services staff respectively) to researchers, research enablers and senior leadership. Others interact predominately with funders and government with little contact with HEIs/ROs.

Overall, stakeholders, and how the initiatives interacted with them (i.e. face-to-face, events, email/ virtual), varied between initiatives, however all initiatives and their stakeholders are linked and involved either directly or indirectly in improving research culture, environment and EDI. There was concern raised, that researchers and research enablers were underrepresented (or not represented) within HEIs and ROs and lacked a formal body within these organisations. This observation was made based on researchers and research enablers rarely being represented in departmental committees or university committees.

In terms of seeking feedback from HEIs/ROs, those initiatives with a strong community -led approach were most active and at the other end of the spectrum, a few initiatives did not gather feedback at all due to a lack of resource.

Potential issues, sensitivities and opportunities

Initiative owners expressed their concerns, challenges and the potential opportunities presented to them by the process of harmonisation and alignment. All initiatives were in agreement that the HE and R&I sector needs were of highest priority and are open to considering harmonisation should this aid the reduction of bureaucracy. For example some initiatives explained steps which they had already been taking or plan to take regarding streamlining and alignment.

A number of initiatives emphasised that some of the bureaucracy felt by HEIs and ROs was of their own creation. For example due to issues such as risk aversion and long decision-making and approvals processes, for even quite simple activities, where instead the initiative owners felt that they should be empowering their stakeholders.

Two of the initiatives expressed no concerns or worries over the prospect of harmonisation, however the remaining nine initiatives expressed at least one of the following:

- Observation that the community-led/ sector-led and other initiatives (government -led) are very different in their approaches and also the diversity represented in their stakeholder groups with which they interact. Are these two approaches compatible?

- Concerns around how changes will impact on HEIs/ROs and their stakeholders. Some community-led initiatives were concerned that they have an engaged network of individuals (bottom-up approach) who are feeling part of a bigger community across the country. This particular initiative owner was not sure how this would be compatible or work with closer alignment to other initiatives. Along a similar line, there were concerns raised around changes which reduce bureaucracy but result in the loss of specific community work carried out by those initiatives which have grown from a community for a specific reason.

- Uncertainty around 'What does harmonisation and alignment look like?', to still be meaningful to cover all of the relevant areas. Initiative owners reflected that this harmonisation and alignment is theoretically an excellent idea, however a unified culture framework may in reality be very challenging to agree on and implement. Initiative owners gave reasons for this including the diversity of HEIs and ROs, and how to select and agree on a culture framework which would meet the needs of both the HEIs and ROs, and their own initiatives.

- One initiative owner expressed concern that, while welcoming and acknowledging the importance of diversity of thought, differences of opinion between initiatives may hold alignment and/or harmonisation back, and that ultimately all involved in this process need to keep the sector and the collective purpose of why the initiatives exist, in mind.

- Dilution: Probably the most frequently mentioned concern. Examples of different, but related reasons for concern and worry over initiative dilution as an unintended outcome of alignment and/or harmonisation are:

  o Concern around being linked to other initiatives and diluting the focus away from the core purpose/ community/ area which that particular initiative was set up to support.

  o Not wanting HEIs and ROs to 'pick and choose' what they value; need to have equal value placed on the initiatives. Potential for 'lack of accountability and decision-making' if this situation arose.

  o Concern that it may become difficult to maintain development and engagement of certain initiatives alongside the competitive and directional aspects of other initiatives.

  o The importance of not 'slipping off the radar' of key senior stakeholders within HEIs/ROs.

- Similar to the notion of dilution, there was concern that these initiatives have been created through a significant amount of thought, support (in terms of the benefits and guidance they provide) and planning. Any proposed solution needs to take this into account and ensure this progress is not lost.

- Another concern was that it is very difficult to generalise and that the initiatives are all so different. For this particular initiative the owners felt that it may align with other frameworks, more closely than with the other initiatives.

- Similarly, initiative owners noted that HEIs and ROs are all very different and there is a risk of 'homogenising' and not allowing those differences to be acknowledged. In addition, concern was raised around any harmonisation of reporting and whether this was really practical or even possible.

- Concerns that the different initiative business models for example not-for-profit, voluntary, or for-profit businesses, may not be compatible with each other in terms of principles, culture and 'customer base'.

- One initiative owner expressed concern that, due to the different drivers and influences on initiatives, at different levels (i.e. the focus on individuals versus HEIs/ROs), harmonisation may be very difficult.

Other potential needs

Other sensitivities and issues which need to be taken into account include:

- Maintaining communication and getting the message strategically 'right' to the sector.

- The observation that initiatives with strong governance structures may find alignment and streamlining more challenging.

- A need for consistency and agreement on how to move forward (for example within UKRI and across funders) with clearly set our roles to ensure stakeholders know what is expected of them.

- The differences between initiatives which are more compliance driven versus self-assessment and how this will be accommodated during harmonisation.

- The governance structure of the initiatives and restraints on advocacy of a particular approach.

- An alignment and streamlining solution which accommodates for all the initiatives (even though they are very different)

- The fact that all of the initiatives are owned by different organisations creates a lot of complexity and there is a strong need for this to be 'joined up'.

We received an overwhelming amount of positive feedback (from initiative owners during interviews) on the importance of reviewing how the initiatives can align more closely, and the hope that, in the future, initiatives will just become embedded within 'how the HEI/RO runs'.

Opportunities

Whilst acknowledging the sensitivities around streamlining and alignment, there were many opportunities and ideas presented by initiative owners including:

- The embedding of public engagement further across the research culture/environment board.

- Measuring impact. Measuring the impact of their initiative is a challenge for most of the initiatives. Reasons for this include no data on this yet as it is so new, lack of capacity to

either gather or analyse and difficulty in what question to ask and to who; 'sometimes it is difficult to tease out as this is just one small factor which influences an answer'. Perhaps collectively impact measurements and progress can be measured more clearly.

- An opportunity for reforms in research assessment by funding bodies, which would result in more fulfilling jobs and better research.

- HEIs and ROs wanting to improve the research culture and equality for their stakeholders, and a need for senior HEI/RO stakeholders to engage and understand 'where are we' from a researcher and research enabler perspective. From the HEI/RO senior leadership perspective, many competing priorities conflict with each other due to the need for resource and time; perhaps harmonisation and more alignment between initiatives can support these senior leaders better.

- A potential opportunity to use the REF environment statement for example, if it is developed at a HEI/RO institutional level not a departmental level (and at the time of writing, this has yet to be decided), to be expanded to include and allow HEIs/ROs to report on their research culture, and for it to be peer reviewed and evaluated.

- Selection/creation of a 'research culture framework' which is coordinated by, for example Research England and the devolved nations, from which there are various 'branches' which institutions can participate in or not, where the whole lot is all under one culture framework.

- Supporting HEIs and ROs around sustainability. Perhaps there is an opportunity to include sustainability within the alignment process solution.

Appendix C – Stage 2: User feedback on the proposed solution

A three-hour online workshop with 21 initiative users was held in October 2022. Attendees included a blend of professional services staff, researchers and research enablers from HEIs and ROs around the UK. Having gathered feedback from initiative owners of their high level of ambition with respect to change and the solution, we asked users during the workshop to provide their own perspectives.

The purpose of this workshop was to present findings so far and gather feedback on the initial proposed solution (the culture-centric approach including the principles and shared values). We then took user feedback gathered in the workshop to further iterate and ultimately create a workable solution for both users and initiative owners (to reduce unnecessary burden/bureaucracy and positively impact research culture) which may be implemented within a reasonable timeframe.

We firstly presented the three scenarios of increasing level of ambition to gauge which of these most appealed to them (see Figure 1).

Through a series of breakout sessions, we tested the initial culture-centric approach, first asking attendees for their initial impressions, followed by more detailed questions to test whether they agreed that placing research culture at the heart of the solution would work in practice. We next explored with them what existing indicators and instruments existed to measure research culture, and could be used as part of the formative reporting within a culture-centric approach.

Users were asked for their initial impressions on both the overall approach, and then the principles themselves. We then started to explore feasibility, for example with questions around existing indicators and instruments to measure research culture which could be used as part of the formative reporting within the culture-centric solution.

Table 1 shows a summary of users' first impressions of the proposed culture-centric solution.

Table 1 Users first impressions on the culture-centric approach and principles.

	Attendees described the solution and principles as:
Positives	
Enthusiasm and ambition present for a shift in focus	• Radical, very timely • Help to facilitate good research culture • Enhance demonstration of value of infrastructure which supports research culture • "Very positive and forward –looking " • "principles themselves – are inspired"
Alignment, integration and cohesion of concordats is welcome	• "Aim of alignment is really welcome" • Will enable institutions to "..better track 'strategising' and implementation around [initiatives]"
An opportunity to improve research culture	• Real change; more positive research culture and reducing bureaucracy/burden
Words of caution	

Additional considerations	• Avoid a box ticking exercise
	• Importance for those in a position of power to drive change
	• Institutional management and process complexities:
	  o Ownership of topics
	  o The need for time
	• Clarity on what institutions are aiming for:
	  o Important but daunting; don't give up just because it's difficult
	  o How exactly to achieve complete alignment
	• Institutional competing priorities and resource
	• The need to take into account wider instruments and factors
	• Changes may make things worse:
	  o Risk that decisions have a negative effect ("by accident")
	  o *"Challenge [is] to deliver a tool which is useful and isn't viewed as an additional burden"*
	• Maintaining the integrity of each initiative

We then asked attendees to identify indicators or attributes of good research culture along with existing instruments which are used to measure these indicators/attributes. A wide range of indicators were cited, ranging from public opinion, transparency of governance structures, to evidence of quality over quantity, to measuring the impact of the institution in nurturing and providing opportunity (to students and employees, see Table 1). In addition, many existing instruments were identified, with REF-related ones (e.g. REF environment) being commonly cited.

When asked to comment on how they felt the initiatives would need to change to put into practice the proposed culture-centric approach, key points made were:

- Reiteration of the need to reduce overlap and for them to work more coherently together.
- The need to pay more regard to engaging researchers and research enablers 'on the ground'.
- For the initiatives to be more formative/good practice-focused, with less prescription (but still being data/evidence focused).
- Recognising that HEIs and ROs are at different stages of their journey, the need to individually consider minimum thresholds, as well as what excellence looks like in various areas of research culture.

Culture-centric approach: Proposed solution iterations

Following the first workshop, the proposed solution was iterated based on the feedback we received from our user group. Principally, this involved:

- Addressing concerns around the definition of 'good' research culture and how to measure it by simplifying our definition of a 'positive research culture' and adding illustrative examples. We made it clearer that research culture (or that shared understanding of research culture) was to be collectively defined by HEIs/ROs (ideally through selection of and agreement on using an existing research culture framework). It was also noted that selection (of a suitable research culture framework) could not be achieved within this phase II project's timescales, or was indeed in scope given the need for a consensus as to which research culture framework to adopt.
- The importance of an approach that can work in practice, and which addresses concerns raised relating to the disconnect between HEI/RO stakeholders and the initiatives.

Given the encouraging level of agreement on the principles and approach expressed by the user group, the concept of a culture framework was introduced as a formal mechanism to embody and enable the solution principles and culture-centric approach. In response to user feedback, we proposed that an agreed, existing research culture framework may be selected and agreed upon and that this would enable both initiative owners to map themselves to this framework, which in turn would enable HEIs and ROs to select attributes in alignment with their research culture strategy and clearly see where and how the initiatives may support them.

Appendix D - Stage 3: Initiative owner feedback on the proposed solution

After receiving feedback on the initial proposed solution from the user group, the iterated version of the proposed solution was presented to initiative owners at a second workshop. This second workshop was held in October 2022, bringing together seven of the eleven initiative owners in scope for this phase of work. The remaining four initiative owners, who were unable to attend, were contacted and provided with the opportunity to review and feedback on information shared with workshop attendees and questions posed during the workshop.

Feedback gathered during the workshop centred on three main areas; the principles, the concept of a culture framework, and how the proposed solution as a whole would impact on individual initiatives.

Initiative owner feedback

Overall, initiative owners supported the idea of alignment to research culture framework and felt that the proposed solution would bring them together and align them around these common principles. The initiative owners also recognised that there was a need to clarify certain aspects such as its exact nature (i.e. which culture framework to select), and that it would need to be flexible/extensive enough to accommodate new initiatives. They also commented on the importance of quality data and that there may be opportunities for some of the wider instruments to be enhanced or broadened to encompass more of the required data.

When asked what the proposed culture-centric solution would mean for their individual initiative and how they would need to change, initiative owners gave a range of answers, with uncertainty around what they may need to do or change. Suggestions offered included:

- Potential need for re-framing or alignment reflections and adjustments to adopt the principles whilst still aligning with the wider environment
- Need to explore reporting duplication and what precisely would be needed (and whether this is possible)
- Importance for the proposed solution to focus on progress not attainment
  The proposed culture-centric solution as an opportunity to raise visibility and promote their initiative

A number of initiatives again brought up the issue of limited resource to align their offerings.

Overall initiative owners present at the workshop felt positive towards the proposed solution (see Table 2 and Table 3), however as one attendee commented *"...the devil is in the detail"* and some acknowledged challenges due to the breadth of what research culture encompasses. Initiative owners also cited the potential difficulty for them to engage and involve the researcher and research enablers within HEIs and ROs in the development and implementation of the proposed culture-centric solution.

Table 2: Initial impressions of the proposed culture-centric solution

	Feedback summary
Positives	• The ambition; Almost unanimously supportive of the 'shift in focus approach' • Has the potential to make a big difference to how HEIs/ROs engage with the initiatives • Liked the idea of a shared understanding of research culture and principles, or something which would bring the initiatives together with common objectives and principles • Opportunity to maximise impact through closer alignment together
Negatives/ potential challenges	• Alignment of reporting; concerns this may be difficult for users or may accidently increase burden • Importance to define 'research culture' to be inclusive of all institution types, i.e. including those less research intensive ROs • Individual initiative –related concerns for example 'no mention of KE in the principles' or concern that the initiatives which deal with the public sector may not be able to align very well
Aspects which were not clear	• A need to interrogate the areas of research culture • How the reporting (single yearly formative and single summative every five years) relates to promoting and supporting good practice • Language to describe the framing for the initiatives • Uncertainty on whether 'research culture' is too broad • "is 'culture' robust enough for external accountability?" • How initiatives which work with businesses in the commercial sector align, or whether they will align • Unclear on how the proposed solution would be coordinated (centrally?) and operate (to be agile and responsive to needs)

Table 3: Initiative owner thoughts on whether the proposed solution will add value.

Attendee quotes
"…a great idea as it will hopefully enable us to align activities to maximise impact."
"[With the proposed solution you are] much more likely to get buy in from senior teams…"
"…helps people understand what the difference initiatives are, what they do and which are relevant to particular HEIs/ROs…"
"…the devil is in the detail…"
"[The proposed solution would allow]….a more joined up approach in HEIs/ROs and enable HEIs/ROs to develop their plans according to its specific characteristics"
"…to help with funding assurance processes…"
"Very positive but if we go down that route there will have to be compromises. There is a lot of overlap between the initiatives which leads to double reporting and even worse slightly different types of data"

Appendix E - Stage 4: Action planning with users and initiative owners

The final workshop saw both the user group and initiative owners bought together to consider the proposed solution (consisting of the eight principles, shared understanding of research culture and measures to reduce bureaucracy and burden) and to consider the actions required for implementation.

Summary of feedback on the proposed solution

Participants were presented with the proposed solution, as described in Section 3. They were asked to review and comment on the requirement specifications and solution elements of the principles. Specifically, participants were asked whether the proposed solution delivers on the aims of this project. There were a range of responses, with concerns raised about i) the complexity of aligning data collection, ii) potential need to tweak or express the principles and requirements differently (though there remained agreement that they were generally sensible and aligned to the issues expressed in prior work and previous workshops during this project).

Similarly, on participants' confidence that the proposed solution would help to overcome the identified problems and fulfil the aims of the project, a range of views were expressed. On a scale of 1-5 (1: proposed solution will completely meet stated aims to 5: not at all), the median score was 3. Again, the main concerns expressed were less about the elements of the proposed solution itself, but the unknowns and potential difficulty of its implementation.

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