

LSE KEI Strategic Plan 2020-2025

1. Vision and context

1.1 Vision

LSE will be the world's leading social science university for research impact. Working with our community of staff, students, alumni and partners, we will use our distinctive expertise to provide new perspectives on and develop innovative solutions to local, national and global challenges.

1.2 LSE history and purpose

LSE was established in 1895 as “a community of people and ideas, founded to know the causes of things, for the betterment of society”, a vision we pursue by advancing education, learning and research for public benefit. Today, LSE is one of the world's foremost social science institutions, with a reputation for being international, interdisciplinary, issue-oriented and pioneering in its development of new methodologies and disciplines. The School is committed to maintaining and strengthening this expertise and to achieving global impact through excellent education and research. That commitment is affirmed in [LSE 2030](#), which emphasises education for global impact, research for the world, and developing LSE for everyone. Knowledge exchange and research impact have an important role to play in delivering these priorities and helping the LSE to “shape the world”.

2. Knowledge exchange and impact at LSE

2.1 Definitions

Knowledge exchange (KE) at LSE refers to the two-way flow of ideas, insights, evidence, expertise and people between academic and non-academic contexts. Impact (I) is understood as any demonstrable extra-academic effect, change or benefit resulting from such flow. Impacts may be felt on, for example, society, policy, public understanding and debate, the economy, culture, health and wellbeing, or the environment. They may be felt by anyone, anywhere and at any scale.

2.2 Areas of existing strength in the delivery of KEI

LSE supports outstanding two-way knowledge exchange with and delivers impacts for a wide range of research partners and users, using social science insights to make meaningful contributions to economic and social wellbeing around the world. Success is evidenced by a broad and growing portfolio of [impact case studies](#). These demonstrate particularly well-established strengths in UK and international public policy, alongside contributions to humanitarian, development and social justice work. LSE research also has important applications in private sector organisations, in efforts to promote financial growth and stability, and in work to tackle climate change. We will continue to take a leading role in demonstrating the value of social science research in these and other contexts by deepening and broadening our impact and convening influential people to address complex issues.

2.3 Activities and approach

LSE's primary goal is to produce social scientific research of the highest possible standard. Our diverse KE activities are – and will continue to be – characterised by their basis in excellent social science. Some of those activities, such as public engagement and the provision of expert advice and research-based evidence, are well-developed, reflecting traditional areas of strategic investment and strength. They are complemented by rapidly growing capacities and expertise in research commercialisation activities, which offer valuable private sector routes to delivering impact.

Engagement may be formal, as in the delivery of commissioned or contracted work through LSE Consulting, or Continued Profession Development through the School's Executive Education programme. It may entail the development of research-based products or services with and through for-profit or social enterprises, and is often carefully planned in externally-funded research. In 2018-19, LSE introduced a Policy Fellow career track. This opened up a new career progression route for staff whose

user-focused and policy-oriented work and engagement activities contribute to policy making, public debate and impact, allowing us to both support and recognise the work they do.

KEI may also arise more serendipitously from *ad hoc* projects run at departmental or project levels, or via personal connections with non-academic partners. Whether formal or informal, many of our engagement activities include such partners as participants in or co-producers of new knowledge.

Central support is provided through the School's KEI Integrated Service, made up of staff in Research & Innovation and in the Communications Division. KEI activity is also supported by central resources such as the successful suite of blogs hosted on the lse.ac.uk platform, which attract very large audiences: an estimated 29 million people have visited LSE blogs, generating almost 44 million views. LSE podcasts include the award-winning LSE IQ, episodes of which were downloaded 360,000 times in 2018-2019. The School supports further engagement through its Research Festival, attended by more than 4,400 people in 2019, and Public Lecture Programme. The latter attracted some 40,000 attendees to almost 150 events in 2018-19 alone; podcasts of those events were downloaded 9,363,934 times.

Financial support for KE activities comes largely from the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF), from which LSE receives some £3.5m annually. Since 2017-18, we have benefitted from additional funding of almost £1m per annum from the National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF). Alongside infrastructural investments, the School is unusual in using its HEIF allocation to provide competitive internal funding for researcher-led (staff and student) KEI projects. The bid fund provides flexible support for researchers to pursue effective KE expected to deliver extra-academic benefits. Among many high-quality projects, the KEI Fund has supported a series of prestigious commissions, including the LSE Growth Commission, LSE Truth, Trust and Technology Commission, LSE-Lancet Commission on the Future of the NHS, and Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development. In 2018, an LSE-led partnership, set up to promote entrepreneurship based on social-science research, was awarded £5m from Research England's Connecting Capability Fund. The outputs of LSE KEI activities are all, as standard, made freely and openly available, in line with the School's broader commitment to the open research agenda. The School encourages all of its departments and centres to be proactive both in seeking and creating opportunities for academic involvement in two-way knowledge exchange, and in accessing appropriate central support for this.

We will build on this considerable experience, and on our areas of existing strength, to deliver research-based economic and societal impacts of outstanding reach and significance.

3. Purpose and objectives of this strategic plan

The primary purpose of this strategic plan is to promote continued improvements in the quality and efficacy of LSE's two-way knowledge exchange, to help ensure that as many as possible of the potential benefits of excellent research conducted at LSE are realised for as many and as diverse beneficiaries as possible. This is in line with the vision and mission set out in [LSE 2030](#), including as it relates to demonstrating the value of the social sciences.

Secondary goals include improving the School's capacity to capitalise on new funding opportunities, including any reconfiguration of the UK's relationship with EU funding programmes, and Government mission- or challenge-led research and KEI agendas. The plan is further intended to help LSE respond positively to sector-wide performance assessments and reporting requirements, including the Research Excellence Framework, Knowledge Exchange Framework and Knowledge Exchange Concordat.

Core objectives in support of these purposes build on the foundations laid by the School's previous investments and achievements in KEI. They are framed here by three cross-cutting principles, which strongly reflect the guiding principles set out in LSE 2030.

3.1 Broadening connection

Maintaining and expanding our partnerships, collaborations and connections is central to achieving the objectives of this plan. It also contributes to LSE's wider strategic goal to demonstrate the value of social sciences for a range of potential partners, funders, businesses, local communities, third sector

organisations, policy-makers and a broad general public in the UK and elsewhere. This reflects the LSE 2030 principle of achieving “Global impact and reach”. Specific objectives in support of this include:

- Strengthening our approach to understanding and developing the depth and breadth of our relationships with current and potential non-academic partners.
- Acting as leaders in promoting continued improvement in effective two-way knowledge sharing in collaboration with new, as well as existing, partners. This will include piloting new methods and models of engagement, including research commercialisation.
- Maximising opportunities for all staff and students to create value for research partners, users and beneficiaries beyond academia. This will include improving processes for identifying and leveraging opportunities to participate in high-quality external KEI activities.
- Making it easier for current and potential external partners and users of LSE research to access and benefit from our work.
- Encouraging and supporting researchers to inspire, consult and collaborate with the public, including (where appropriate) by involving them in research.
- Acting as an anchor institution for social sciences in London, bringing together local, national and international research partners and users to promote a distinctive social science approach to tackling pressing challenges.
- Continuing to make the case for social sciences by demonstrating their public, policy, social and economic relevance.

3.2 Enhancing inclusion

The School takes an inclusive approach to supporting research across the breadth of its disciplines. We also seek to deliver positive impacts from that research for wide-ranging beneficiaries in the UK and internationally, and to use whichever processes or activities are most suited to that end in any particular case. This reflects the LSE 2030 principle of “Excellence built from diversity and inclusion”. Objectives in support of enhanced inclusion include:

- Continuing to emphasise the importance of genuinely two-way engagement and exchange.
- Working with partners in a range of public and private and third sectors, as well as in local communities, to contribute positively to the society, economy, culture, health and wellbeing of wide-ranging and diverse groups.
- Seeking ways to deliver benefits to new, wider or more diverse users and beneficiaries, and to uphold equity in access to those benefits. We will be particularly alert to opportunities to increase work with groups that have traditionally been marginalised or disadvantaged in their access to KE.
- Recognising and nurturing diverse areas and types of impact associated with the full breadth of disciplinary and cross-disciplinary research carried out at LSE.
- Ensuring that the outputs of KE activity continue to be made freely and openly available.
- Promoting a productive and mutually beneficial relationship between research impact and teaching and the student experience. This will include increasing opportunities for students to participate in knowledge exchange activities, and support for our thriving student entrepreneurship and civic engagement activities, both of which are being further developed under the heading of LSE Student Futures. It will also involve supporting researchers to embed case studies of engagement and impact into taught programmes, and to involve students in KEI activities as appropriate, including through entrepreneurship. This is in line with the LSE 2030 priority, “Educate for global impact”.

3.3 Promoting responsible and financially sustainable KEI

Properly resourcing, supporting, recognising and rewarding KEI activities (both at School level and at the level of departments and centres) is essential to realising the public benefits of LSE research. Progress here requires further capacity-building activity and work to improve the ways in which we monitor, evaluate and record KEI activities and outcomes. This reflects aspects of the LSE 2030 principle of “Ensuring a sustainable future”.

Activity in this area will build on existing support provided by the KEI Integrated Service and the Public Affairs team to amplify the reach of our KE activity. It will also include the creation of the LSE Innovation office to support research commercialisation, enhancing LSE's corporate engagement office to facilitate more coordinated interactions with business to secure funding and collaboration, and expansion of LSE Generate to support our student entrepreneurship activities.

Additional work to promote responsible, financially sustainable KEI at LSE will include:

- Ensuring that KEI is included appropriately in induction processes, and in recruitment and promotions processes for academic and professional services staff, and for research students.
- Improving monitoring and reporting of KEI-related data, including seeking more direct feedback from non-academic research partners and beneficiaries. This will help us to better understand and improve our "impact environment", including by sharing best practice.
- Enhancing the profile of KEI by sharing and celebrating examples of success.
- Increasing the amount and quality of training and support available to researchers and professional services staff supporting KEI.
- Encouraging and supporting effective succession planning for impactful projects.
- Continuing to provide support for KEI projects through an internally competitive bid fund.
- Building on progress during the current REF lifecycle to ensure that LSE has an effective and transparent process for identifying and supporting the development of REF impact case studies.
- Contributing actively to discussion about research impact and its use in research assessment around the world, including leading debate about appropriate measures of research impact.
- Promoting LSE's ability to respond positively to sector-wide performance assessments, notably the Research Excellence Framework (REF), Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) and Knowledge Exchange Concordat (KEC).
- Promoting LSE's reputation for engaging students actively with research and impact activities, notably through our Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) submission.
- Maximising the School's capacity to leverage external funding to support ongoing excellence in KEI, including through future iterations of HEIF and NPIF, reconfiguration of the UK's relationship with EU funding programmes, and new Governmental mission-led research and KEI agendas.
- Upholding our commitments as a charitable organisation, working to maximise benefits to our research partners within this context.

4. Use of the KEI strategic plan

Together the objectives described here will provide an agreed basis informing:

- Decisions about the allocation of internal KEI funding in an increasingly competitive environment.
- Decisions about the allocation of core funding for infrastructure or activities central to the School's KEI goals in line with LSE 2030.
- High-quality external bids to existing and (potentially) new KEI funders (notably to HEIF 7, NPIF or equivalent funding programmes which may be introduced), to help ensure the sustainability of work to realise the impacts of our research.
- School responses to relevant aspects of existing and planned assessment frameworks, notably REF, KEF and the KE Concordat.

The plan will be reviewed annually and updated not later than September 2025.