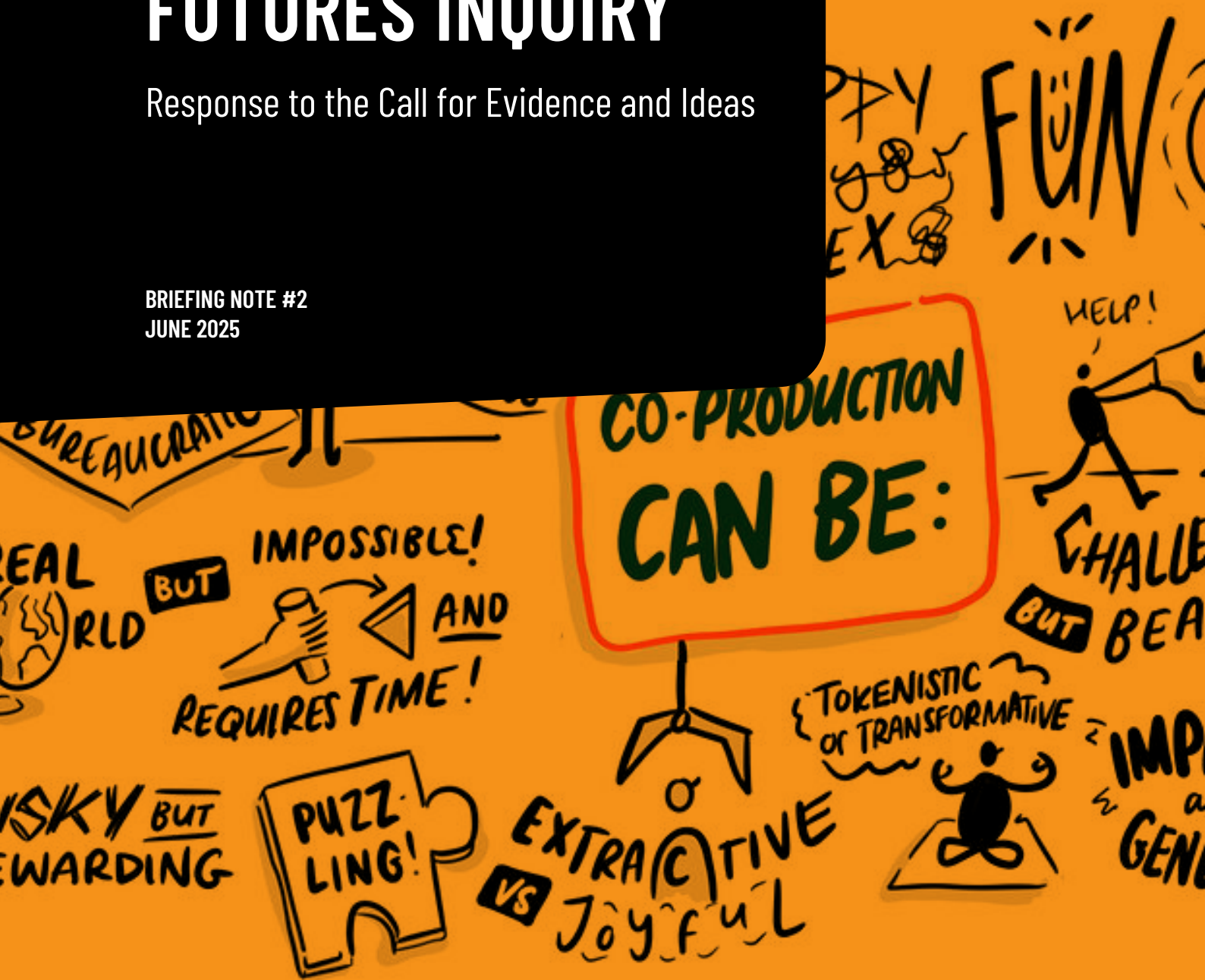


SUMMARY REPORT

# THE CO-PRODUCTION FUTURES INQUIRY

Response to the Call for Evidence and Ideas

BRIEFING NOTE #2  
JUNE 2025



This report synthesises the evidence gathered through the Co-Pro Futures Inquiry's Call for Evidence and Ideas, conducted between 5 December 2024 and 28 February 2025. The Inquiry aims to propose actionable measures to overcome systemic barriers to participatory and co-produced research within universities and the broader higher education sector.

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**Acknowledgements:** Many thanks to everyone who has submitted evidence, met with us to discuss the call, and promoted it. The Co-Pro Futures project is funded by Research England's Participatory Research Fund at the Universities of Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## HOW TO TRACK AND SUPPORT OUR PROGRESS



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The Co-Pro Futures Inquiry aims to identify practical sector-wide and institutional changes that can improve the conditions for co-produced and participatory research within UK universities and the Higher Education (HE) sector. It is funded by Research England's Participatory Research Fund at the Universities of Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield.

This report synthesises the evidence gathered through the Co-Pro Futures Inquiry's Call for Evidence and Ideas, conducted between 5 December 2024 and 28 February 2025. The Call is one key way that we have gathered collective intelligence to support the sector-wide development of an action plan to address the barriers to participatory and co-produced research in UK HE.

We received a total of 94 submissions from 87 individuals/organisations, which provided a total of 239 individual pieces of evidence in a variety of formats, including testimonies, reports, articles, case studies, toolkits, videos, recommendations and examples of solutions. This evidence came predominantly from researchers and professional services staff from a diverse range of UK Higher Education Institutions. However, we also received submissions from funders, charities, Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), government bodies, and Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs).

The submissions spanned diverse disciplines, with the highest proportion from the Social Sciences. This was followed by healthcare and interdisciplinary submissions. We received several submissions from the Arts and Humanities, and a few from STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).

The evidence confirms a clear and widespread acknowledgement of significant barriers to conducting participatory and co-produced research across UK HE. Over half of the submissions highlighted these recurring barriers. These include issues trying to pay co-researchers, the constraints of short or linear funding timelines, ethics procedures being misaligned with the realities of co-produced research, and the prioritisation of more 'traditional' research outputs. Such issues are felt across the entire lifecycle of participatory projects, impacting researchers from doctoral level to senior academics, as well as professional service staff and community partners.

The analysis mapped these barriers onto the Inquiry's four primary cross-cutting themes:

**Fair Funding:** Challenges range from a lack of dedicated funding and short-term project cycles to complex administrative hurdles in paying partners equitably. Funding models often fail to align with the emergent and non-linear nature of co-produced research, and power hierarchies often lead to uneven distribution of funding.

**Equitable Partnerships:** There are various barriers to achieving reciprocal, transparent, non-hierarchical relationships between academics and community partners. In addition to funding constraints, these include inaccessible and complex contracts and legal frameworks, hierarchical practices around data ownership and recognition, and digital exclusion for co-researchers who lack access to university resources.

**Negotiated Ethics:** University ethical review processes were described as lengthy, inconsistent, inflexible, inaccessible, and ill-suited to the dynamic nature of co-production. This reinforces power hierarchies between researchers and community partners. There are also issues around the prevalence of tokenism and ‘trauma mining’ when working with people with lived experience, as well as the ethical implications for international partners, particularly in low and middle-income countries around the world.

**Metrics:** There is a clear and consistent concern that traditional academic metrics and outputs often fail to adequately recognise or value the diverse outcomes, experiential knowledge, and broader impacts of co-produced research.

In addition to these themes, the evidence revealed the significant and often unseen and undervalued **relational, emotional, and administrative labour** involved in navigating complex institutional systems that are not designed for this work. These cumbersome and inconsistent institutional processes were said to significantly **undermine trust** within research partnerships and damage the university’s credibility and reputation. In addition, the evidence highlighted the **situated challenges for doctoral researchers** undertaking participatory research, often stemming from the structures of PhD programmes that prioritise individual contributions and fixed timelines over collaborative engagement.

The evidence highlighted some examples of steps being taken to overcome these barriers, including the development of innovative funding models, participatory ethics processes, more accessible contracts, adjusted employment processes for community partners, and dedicated participatory research support roles. We also received a wealth of guidance documents and toolkits available to help navigate these barriers.

However, while the evidence demonstrated some solutions that are currently being tried and tested, these are often ad-hoc, project-specific, or rely heavily on ‘imperfect workarounds’ – these are typically informal, short-term solutions or adjustments implemented by researchers of project teams to bypass, mitigate, or navigate specific institutional barriers encountered during participatory and co-produced research, without fundamentally altering the underlying structures or cultures causing the barrier. For example, some testimonies highlighted how researchers resort to delegating funds to community organisations or third parties to avoid delays and distrust in university payment systems. The evidence demonstrated that some participatory researchers are often doing their work ‘despite not because of’ the university.

The prevalence of these ad-hoc solutions and workarounds suggests that the current systems are not fit-for-purpose. As highlighted in our first Briefing Document<sup>1</sup>, there continues to be a ‘missing middle’ between the aspirations for researchers to do their work in a more participatory way and the cultures and structures of the places where they work. This report therefore prompts continued questions as to whether there are sustained, institutional or sector-wide approaches that meaningfully address the barriers identified.

At present, this report serves to synthesise the main themes that arose from the evidence submitted to the Inquiry. Moving forward, we will identify the key takeaways, gaps, and implications of these findings with our Community Reference Group. These reflections, together with our upcoming review of the secondary evidence, will shape how we facilitate deliberations with our Inquiry Panel going forward and our action plan for change. In the spirit of the Inquiry, and with the consent of the respondents, we also intend to make as much of the evidence submitted to the Inquiry openly accessible in an interactive online archive.

# BACKGROUND TO THE CO-PRO FUTURES INQUIRY

The Co-Pro Futures Inquiry aims to propose measures to address barriers to participatory and co-produced research<sup>2</sup> within universities and the higher education sector. Between 2024 and 2026, this involves workshops, interviews, a public Call for Evidence and Ideas, desk-based secondary analysis, and a high-profile panel drawn from the higher education sector who will identify actions that can be put into practice. The process is overseen by a Community Reference Group, made up of individuals from the community, voluntary and public sectors with expertise in co-producing research with university partners. This will culminate in the launch of our action plan in July 2026.

## Why we're doing this

In their initial introductory report, *Getting our house in order: Improving conditions for co-produced research in UK higher education* (2024), Beth Perry, Catherine Durose, and Liz Richardson (the Inquiry's co-leads), outline the rationale for setting up the Co-Pro Futures Inquiry.<sup>3</sup> There has been a growing emphasis on iterative approaches to knowledge exchange and a recognition of the need to consider wider research cultures – specifically, how research is produced, with whom, and for whom. This has moved co-production and participatory research from the margins to the mainstream<sup>4</sup>. Despite this positive progress, there is still more work to do.

Participatory researchers sometimes end up doing their work 'despite not because of'<sup>5</sup> the university. There, therefore, continues to be what they describe as a 'missing middle'<sup>6</sup> between the aspirations for researchers to do their work in a more participatory way and the cultures and structures of the places where they work.

Crucially, while there is a wealth of guidance aimed at individual researchers on how to do more ethical, participatory research, there has been not enough sector-wide reflection on what universities, funders, and policy-makers themselves need to do to support this effectively.

This is why the Inquiry seeks to directly build on and move past well-documented limitations, aiming to identify practical, sector-wide, and institutional changes that can fundamentally improve conditions for co-produced research. The Inquiry includes community and civic organisations with experience of co-production, sector leaders from funding and policy institutions, and individuals involved in funding participatory research (see *Getting Our House in Order* 2024 for more information on how we have structured the Inquiry).

The Inquiry is built around four cross-cutting themes, which we will use to look across the evidence and ideas we generate (Box 1).

## BOX 1: OUR FOUR INITIAL THEMES



### FAIR FUNDING

Funding arrangements can make genuine partnerships within co-produced research projects harder to achieve at both the design and delivery stages. For instance, there may be rules prohibiting how partners can be paid. University systems may be inflexible or not take the tight cash flows of smaller, voluntary organisations into account.



### EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIPS

Contracts or intellectual property rules and regulations can also undermine the ideal of equal partnerships. For instance, legal terminology can be difficult to understand, introduce transactional logics around providing services, or force partners to give away credit for jointly developed work.



### RESPONSIBLE METRICS

Many researchers feel that co-produced and participatory work is often not as highly valued or rewarded, even though it is increasingly encouraged by funders. The continued prioritisation of certain kinds of outputs over others can disincentivise participatory researchers and is especially challenging for those at the early career stage.



### NEGOTIATED ETHICS

Ethical reviews tend to be static and can often reaffirm traditional boundaries between researchers and 'researched'. One-off ethical approvals do not help researchers negotiate the ethical complexities of sustained, deep-value relationships required for co-producing research.

## Launching the Call for Evidence and Ideas

Between December 2024 and February 2025, we launched our Call for Evidence and Ideas. We gathered evidence from people, organisations and stakeholders with experience of co-producing research with universities to demonstrate the size and scale of the problem and actions and solutions that are already being tried and tested within the higher education sector.

This report explains how we conducted the Call, the level and profile of responses received, and highlights how the core overarching themes were present across the submitted evidence.

The findings outlined in this report, along with reflections and guidance from our Community Reference Group, will determine how we facilitate the Inquiry Panel going forward, who will deliberate on the findings and develop an action plan for change.

# THE CALL FOR EVIDENCE AND IDEAS

**THE CO-PRO FUTURES INQUIRY**

**Co-Pro Futures Inquiry**

**Call for Evidence and Ideas**

**OPEN**  
28<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2025

**WE WANT EVIDENCE TO DEMONSTRATE**

1. The size and scale of the problem

2. Actions and solutions that are already being tried and tested

**EVIDENCE EXAMPLES**

Evidence might include: Case studies | Evaluation reports | Testimonies | Academic journal articles and books | Strategic documents/policies | Online outputs | Creative outputs: film, photos, media or blogs | Toolkits | Guidance | Examples of university initiatives | Practical steps of how to work around challenges | Examples of funding innovations.

**IDEAS**

Ideas for what kinds of formal and informal actions might really change the conditions for co-produced research

We hope to hear evidence from:

- Researchers | Co-researchers | Partner organisations | Professional service staff | University leaders and managers | Infrastructure organisations | Funders | Higher education policy-makers.

**HOW TO SUBMIT?**

Share your evidence on the Linked-in group Co-Pro Futures LinkedIn group

Collective Intelligence-Gathering form [forms.gle/cwA5hTtATx9ADHYk7](https://forms.gle/cwA5hTtATx9ADHYk7)

Email the Co-Pro Futures team [coprofutures@gmail.com](mailto:coprofutures@gmail.com)

**WHAT WILL WE DO WITH THE EVIDENCE?**

We will review and analyse the submissions

Evidence will then inform briefings for an inquiry panel

Launch of the action plan in July 2026

The Inquiry Panel will meet and deliberate on the evidence

The Co-Pro Futures Inquiry is supported by allocations from the Participatory Research Funds at the Universities of Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield.

If you have any questions about the Co-Pro Futures Inquiry, email us on [coprofutures@gmail.com](mailto:coprofutures@gmail.com)

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL | UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD | MANCHESTER | RESEARCH INFLUENCE

The Call for Evidence and Ideas was launched on 5 December 2024, with a response deadline of 28 February 2024. The purpose was to identify everyday practices and systemic innovations, policies, processes and cultures that can overcome barriers to co-produced research, and which can inform wider actions to shape sector-wide change.

We collected evidence to demonstrate 1) the size and scale of the problem and 2) actions and solutions that are already being tried and tested within the higher education sector.

We appealed for evidence in the form of case studies, evaluation reports, and testimonies from projects; academic journal articles or books; strategic documents/policies at an organisational level; online and/or creative outputs, such as film, photos, media or blogs; toolkits or guidance aimed at institutions/funders; examples of university initiatives to address cultural or structural barriers; practical steps on how to work imaginatively within institutions to work around challenges to participatory research; examples and experiences of funding innovations.

We also asked for ideas about what kinds of sector- and/or institution-level actions might change the conditions for co-produced research.

We asked for submissions from researchers, co-researchers, partner organisations, professional service staff, university leaders and managers, infrastructure organisations, funders and higher education policy-makers. This included those working in the UK and international partners in/funders of co-produced research projects which involve UK universities.

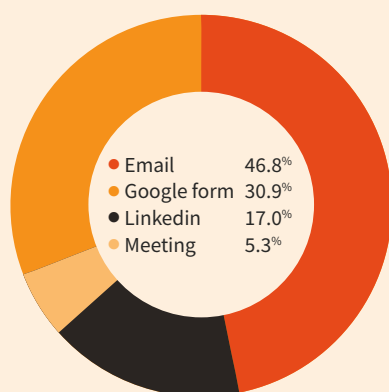
People were invited to submit evidence via our dedicated email account, Google Form, and LinkedIn group. We also conducted online evidence gathering meetings with those who either requested to submit their evidence verbally or provide more context to their submission.

# LEVEL AND PROFILE OF RESPONSES

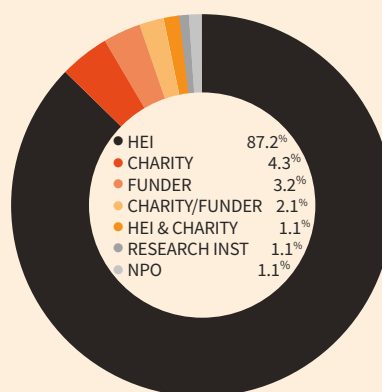
In total, we received **94** submissions to the call for evidence from **87 individuals/organisations** (some individuals/organisations made multiple submissions). This equated to **239** individual pieces of evidence.

Email was the most common method of response, followed by the Google Form. Additional responses came from the LinkedIn group, and a smaller portion were collected through online evidence meetings.

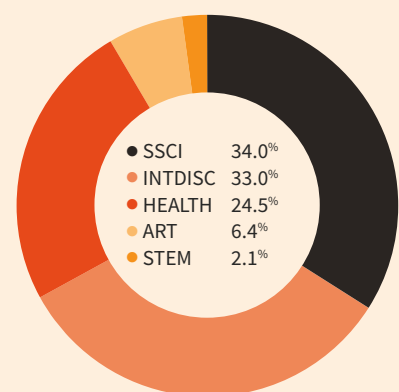
**Figure 1: Overview of submission method**



**Figure 2: Total submissions by organisation**



**Figure 3: Total submissions by discipline**



**Figure 4: Submissions from Higher Education Institutions by location**



- Bath Spa University
- Birkbeck, University of London
- Bournemouth University
- Brunel University London
- Durham University
- Imperial College London
- King's College London
- London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
- Loughborough University
- Manchester Metropolitan University
- Queen Mary University of London
- Sheffield Hallam University
- The Open University
- University of Bath
- University of Birmingham
- University of Bristol
- University of Central Lancashire
- University of Edinburgh
- University of Exeter
- University of Glasgow
- University of Leeds
- University of Liverpool
- University of Manchester
- University of Nottingham
- University of Oxford
- University of Plymouth
- University of Portsmouth
- University of Sheffield
- University of Sunderland
- University of the Arts London
- University of the West England
- University of York
- University College London
- York St John University

## **Types of evidence received**

We received evidence in the form of testimonies, articles, videos, examples of research projects, reports, guidance documents, blogs, toolkits, conference presentations, book chapters, websites, infographics, case studies, strategic documents, books, evaluation reports, internal meeting reports, podcasts, policy briefs, event summaries, theses, visual contracts, zines, news articles, manifestos, slideshows, examples of process innovations and initiatives, and draft policies.

We received **27 bespoke submissions** (28.7% of total submissions), which equated to **55 individual pieces of evidence** (23% of total pieces of evidence submitted). Evidence is classed as bespoke if it was purposefully compiled by individuals/organisations to offer original insights, context, or reflections as opposed to solely sharing pre-existing resources. They were received as long-form, reflective documents or verbal contributions in evidence meetings. The bespoke submissions typically responded directly to the Inquiry's aims and questions outlined in the Call for Evidence and Ideas.

## **Breakdown of submissions by organisation**

The majority of submissions came from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), which accounted for **87.2%** of submissions (equating to **89.1%** of total pieces of evidence). Of these submissions, **7.4%** came from Professional Services staff (equating to **5.9%** of total pieces of evidence).

We received evidence from a diverse range of Higher Education Institutions from across the UK (see Figure 4 above).

We also received submissions from charities (**4.3%** of total submissions, **3.8%** of total pieces of evidence), funders (**3.2%** of total submissions, **3.8%** of total pieces of evidence), as well as charities that are also funders (**2.1%** of total submissions, **1.7%** of total pieces of evidence). In addition, we received one submission from a Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) (**1.1%** of total submissions, **0.4%** of total pieces of evidence), a Research Institute (**1.1%** of total submissions, **0.8%** of total pieces of evidence), and a joint submission from a HEI and a charity (**1.1%** of total submissions, **0.4%** of total pieces of evidence). See the appendix for a full list of the institutional affiliations of those who submitted evidence.

## **Breakdown of submissions by discipline**

We received the highest number of submissions from the **Social Sciences**, which accounted for **34%** of total submissions and **39.3%** of total pieces of evidence. This was followed by **interdisciplinary** submissions (e.g. a university-wide initiative or a research project conducted across disciplines), which accounted for **33%** of total submissions and **25.5%** of total pieces of evidence. We also received submissions from **Healthcare**, which accounted for **24.5%** of total submissions and **25.5%** of total pieces of evidence, as well as **Arts and Humanities**, which accounted for **6.4%** of total submissions and **7.9%** of total pieces of evidence. Finally, **2.1%** of submissions were from **Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM)**, which equated to **1.7%** of total pieces of evidence.

## **The size and scale of the problem**

Just over half of the evidence base (**123** pieces of evidence, **51.5%** of total pieces of evidence submitted) included examples that highlight the **recurring barriers** that make co-produced and participatory research difficult. Recommendations for **how to overcome these barriers** were provided in **22.6%** of total pieces of evidence submitted (**54** pieces of evidence). A smaller portion – **10%** (**24** pieces of evidence) – offered **practical suggestions for change** (e.g. guidance on how to pay public partners equitably) or examples of process innovations that are being tried and tested (e.g. innovative funding models).

We also received **13** pieces of evidence (**5.4%** of total pieces of evidence submitted) that included examples of **temporary workarounds** being implemented by individuals to navigate these barriers. These refer to ad hoc, often informal, and typically short-term solutions or adjustments implemented by researchers or project teams to bypass, mitigate, or navigate specific structural or procedural barriers encountered during participatory and co-produced research, without fundamentally altering the underlying structures or cultures causing the barrier.

**20** pieces of evidence (**8.4%** of total pieces of evidence submitted) were submitted to demonstrate examples of successful co-produced projects, usually outlining the **benefits** of doing co-produced and participatory research. **31** pieces of evidence (**13%**) also included a set of **best practice principles** and **advice** for participatory researchers.

**52** pieces of evidence (**21.8%**) offered examples of specific co-produced or participatory projects.

# ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES BY THEME

## Overview

The responses were analysed in relation to the four cross-cutting themes identified at the start of the project – Fair Funding, Negotiated Ethics, Metrics, Equitable Partnerships – in addition to any other themes that arose within and outside of these.

Overall, the majority of the evidence spoke to one or more of the four pre-identified themes. Many pieces of evidence spoke to multiple themes, meaning that a single piece of evidence may appear in multiple codes. These totals, therefore, reflect how often that theme was present across the evidence, not how many pieces of evidence were *only* about that theme.

The most common issues mentioned related to Equitable Partnerships (mentioned in **92** pieces of evidence, **38.5%** of total pieces of evidence submitted) and Fair Funding (mentioned in **90** pieces of evidence, **37.7%** of total pieces of evidence submitted). Negotiated Ethics was also a prominent concern, mentioned in **82** pieces of evidence (**34.3%** of total pieces of evidence submitted). Metrics was mentioned the least, though still referred to in **47** pieces of evidence (**19.7%** of total pieces of evidence submitted).

In addition to the four main themes, we also received **10** pieces of evidence (**4.2%** of total pieces of evidence submitted) specifically highlighting the situated challenges experienced by doctoral researchers undertaking participatory research. Although many of these barriers speak to the four main themes, they also stem from the structures of doctoral programmes and therefore may require bespoke solutions.

Multiple pieces of evidence also highlighted the relational, emotional, and administrative labour involved in doing participatory and co-produced research, which often remains unseen and undervalued.

Finally, a recurring implication shared by respondents in both evidence submissions and our online meetings was that the cumbersome institutional processes outlined can significantly undermine trust within research partnerships, as well as the credibility and reputation of the university.

The next section discusses each of these issues in turn. It provides an overview of the barriers and impacts outlined in the evidence, the recommendations made by respondents, as well as examples of solutions that are already being tried and tested.

## **Fair funding**

Based on the evidence, funding arrangements present numerous significant challenges for co-produced research. Overall, issues ranged from a lack of dedicated funding and short-term project cycles to complex administrative hurdles in paying partners equitably. Responses also highlighted the inherent inflexibility of funding structures that struggle to accommodate the emergent and non-linear nature of co-produced research. Many responses, reinforced through formal and informal discussions in online meetings, emphasised the mismatch between the expectations of funders for research to be co-produced and the underlying structural issues within funding models that fail to facilitate and support this in practice. These funding-related barriers, particularly issues paying research partners, were also seen to undermine efforts to build equitable partnerships, as well as raising ethical concerns and reinforcing a power hierarchy between the university and community partners.

The evidence demonstrated that researchers are employing imperfect workarounds to mitigate these barriers. Steps are also being taken towards institutional change, such as innovative funding models which offer seed funding and direct community grants, dedicated support roles to help navigate financial processes, guidance on paying co-researchers and adjusted, more inclusive employment processes.

### **Overview of the barriers and impacts**

#### ***Payment and recognition for co-researchers***

The most common barrier discussed throughout the evidence base related to difficulties experienced when paying co-researchers and community partners for their time and in recognition of their contribution to the project. This was mentioned in 52 pieces of evidence (across 33 separate submissions). The evidence showed that these difficulties stem from unclear, inconsistent, inaccessible, and inflexible funding rules and institutional systems and processes. This, in turn, creates confusion, delays in processing payments, which negatively impact community partners, and administrative burdens for both researchers and community partners.

The responses highlighted the following barriers in particular:

- Inconsistent and conflicting guidance about the employment status of co-researchers causes confusion and administrative burden.
- Institutions may require research partners to be put on their payroll, which can create delays and an administrative burden.
- Payment systems favour consistent, time-based models and place restrictive limits on one-off payments and vouchers.
- Requirements for specific software to complete payment forms can exclude some individuals.
- Lack of support for people in receipt of welfare benefits.

- Unclear separation between expenses and income for tax purposes.
- Having to employ co-researchers on casual contracts without access to university benefits.
- Charity and university hiring practices often require formal qualifications, employment history, references, and lengthy written applications—criteria some co-researchers cannot meet, making it difficult to employ them in co-produced research.

In addition, three separate submissions highlighted difficulties around reimbursing project partners for the administrative costs of visa applications and explained that this was not covered by their research funding. This hinders the mobility of project partners from low and middle-income countries around the world who need to travel to attend research-related activities (University of Sheffield, Evidence No. 239; Anonymous, Evidence No. 170; Anonymous, Evidence No. 188). Many responses also framed these barriers to paying community partners as an ethical issue.

#### ***Short-term and non-recurrent funding durations***

15 pieces of evidence (from 15 separate submissions) also highlighted that funding for participatory and co-produced projects is typically short-term and non-recurrent. In particular, the responses highlighted how this funding model fails to align with the time required to build trust with community partners and to sustain relationships during and after the research.

#### ***Inflexibility and the outcome-oriented nature of funding models***

Linked to this, 12 pieces of evidence (from 12 separate submissions) also outlined how funding applications often require pre-specified outputs and roles, which clash with the non-linear nature of co-produced work and can limit the flexibility needed for co-production to evolve organically. Evidence from one submission outlined how there is “a need to deliver and be accountable for what has been pre-specified rather than something that evolves from co-production activities” (University of Liverpool and University of Plymouth, Synergy Project, Evidence No. 99).<sup>7</sup> Some of these responses referenced the outcome-oriented nature of funding models as a particular barrier, highlighting the need for process-driven models instead. One submission, for example, highlighted the need for more focus on activities such as “relationship building, identifying shared values, [and] uncovering assumptions” (LinkedIn post, Evidence No. 106).

#### ***Financial constraints***

In addition, the evidence indicated that the full costs of co-producing research are not perceived to be accepted by funders. One submission outlined how financial constraints were said to limit essential activities like travel for international collaborations and the ability to cover other transport costs and secure suitable spaces for collaborative activities (University of Manchester, Evidence No. 59). Another submission highlighted how “some funding bodies acknowledge the cost of participatory research, but support is often discovered by chance rather than systematically provided” (Submission from the *Ethnicity and Unequal Ageing project*, Evidence No. 171). Limited funding was also highlighted as a barrier to appropriately remunerating community partners (mentioned above).

#### ***Power hierarchies and uneven distribution of funding***

The evidence also suggested that traditional funding structures can reinforce power hierarchies between the university and community partners. For example, one submission from the Institute for Social Justice (ISJ), York St John University highlighted

that if funding structures are university-led, this can enhance the capacity of university academics more than that of community partners (Institute for Social Justice, York St John University, Evidence No. 7). As the ISJ sits within the university, it automatically follows the priorities, timings, and processes established by the university, and hence there is a tendency to support academics more than Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) partners. Another submission highlighted how research funding application processes often fail to recognise or categorise co-production partners as researchers (Anonymous, Evidence No. 188).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN THE EVIDENCE**

Where recommendations were provided, the majority of these pointed towards a need for greater flexibility, responsiveness, and equity in how co-produced research is funded and supported within academic institutions.

Many responses called for moving beyond the frequent need to make co-production fit existing templates for more standard funding calls. Instead, they recommended:

- Sustainable funding models that support the full cycle of engagement, including seed funding for work leading up to the start of a project, and value relationship building and maintenance as worthwhile activities.
- Unallocated budget to take forward ad-hoc requests and needs identified during co-produced research.
- Dedicated funding streams or weighting criteria that favour collaborative projects with demonstrable wider impact.
- Built-in funding for collaborators to support research.
- Rethinking ‘letters of support’ in funding applications so that they become ‘letters of collaboration’ between the partner and the project.

On payment and reimbursement specifically, the evidence recommended:

- Exploring ways to acknowledge co-producers’ contributions in ways that are valuable to them, which may not be monetary.
- Providing training across university departments regarding tax implications for community researchers.
- Developing clear guidance for external collaborators for navigating university systems and processes (e.g. the casual worker system and invoicing).
- Flexible payment terms for partners and improved systems for remunerating participants (e.g. task-based payment models, allowing partners to invoice monthly or ahead of provision of services, and using academic salary scales for costing community partners’ time when their salary is lower).

## Steps already being taken to address these barriers

We received examples of instances where academic and professional services staff at HEIs were employing temporary ‘workarounds’ to navigate these barriers, predominantly around payment-related issues. In addition to these ad-hoc workarounds, we also received evidence of longer-term solutions that are being tried and tested, such as innovative funding models, the creation of dedicated university support roles, and guidance documents on paying co-researchers.

### *Temporary workarounds*

- Using vouchers to compensate co-researchers’ time in the absence of alternatives, or to avoid navigating bureaucratic systems to gain approval for alternatives.
- Using vouchers or pre-paying for food, travel, or other related costs for co-researchers who do not have the funds to pay for these costs up front.
- Delegating funds to community organisations or third parties to handle the distribution of payments to community members, to avoid delays and distrust in university systems.
- Assisting research partners with contract and payment-related administration, such as helping them fill out complex forms or understanding systems and processes.

### *Examples of innovative funding models*

We received a select number of examples where dedicated funding models are being developed. The selected examples below provide evidence of funding models which:

- 1) provide financial support during the development phase;
- 2) offer direct funding to community organisations;
- 3) are flexible and process-driven;
- 4) are more straightforward and accessible.

The Brigstow Institute at the University of Bristol developed the *Ideas Exchange Funding* to support people in designing co-produced research applications and to pay for partners’ time during the bid development phase. This represents a direct investment in the early stages of collaboration (University of Bristol, Evidence No. 12).

Similarly, the Institute for Social Justice’s Community Research Grant (CRG) programme funds collaborative projects between university academics and VCSE organisations in Yorkshire and Humber (Institute for Social Justice, York St John University, Evidence No.7). It involves community partners in all stages. They also introduced a project continuation grant for previous grantees to consolidate more sustainable relationships.

The British Science Association's (BSA) *Ideas Fund* community grants directly fund community organisations to work in partnership with researchers on topics important to them. This aimed to address the power dynamics inherent in traditional funding models. They also implemented more straightforward application processes to make it accessible to community groups, and allowed informal/unconstituted groups or individuals to apply for grants to reduce the structural barriers for participation. In addition, they highlighted how the actual work to be delivered was “determined by the partnership, rather than via fixed outcomes dictated by The BSA or Wellcome” and emphasise the value of “outcome agnosticism” in their funding model (British Science Association, Evidence No. 186). Their “incubator grants” also provide financial support for shortlisted organisations to cover the time taken to develop proposals. Their *Highlands and Islands Climate Change Community Grants* (H&ICCCG) directly funded community organisations to lead or co-lead research projects, and the Community-Led Research Pilot also provided grants directly to community groups to develop their own research questions.

The Research England Participatory Research Fund open call was highlighted as an example of dedicated, flexible funding that allows researchers to collaborate meaningfully with partners and adapt to their needs. One submission outlined how the Fund is process-driven, not outcome-driven, allowing researchers to be flexible and responsive in responding to the needs and experience of partners (University of Bristol, Evidence No. 179). However, it was also noted that this Fund is non-recurrent and therefore does not mitigate the barriers created as a result of short-term funding durations discussed above.

#### ***Dedicated university support roles***

Multiple submissions from universities highlighted how they have created dedicated Professional Service roles to support researchers doing participatory and co-produced research. For example, King's College London has a dedicated role to support researchers with embedding co-production costs, roles, and logistics into research grants from the start (Evidence No. 118). The Institute for Social Justice at York St John University also has two project managers who support academics in navigating financial and procurement processes (Evidence No. 7).

#### ***Guidance on paying co-researchers***

We also received many guidance and best practice documents outlining how to navigate some of the payment-related barriers mentioned above, such as the Social Change Agency's Payment for Involvement Playbook<sup>8</sup>, and guidance provided by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) on how public contributors should be paid for their involvement.<sup>9</sup>

#### ***Adjusted employment processes***

To overcome rigid employment practices that make it difficult to employ co-researchers, one submission explained how charity and university recruitment processes were adjusted to meet the needs of the research and ensure Roma individuals were encouraged to apply for researcher roles. This included holding drop-in sessions to meet the research team, asking questions in their preferred language (with an interpreter), and offering support to complete the application. Interviews were also held with reasonable adjustments (Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre, Evidence No. 205).

## **Equitable partnerships**

The evidence also highlighted various barriers to achieving sustainable and equitable partnerships, which were broadly understood as reciprocal, transparent, non-hierarchical relationships between academics and research partners built on continuous engagement, trust and an understanding of mutual benefit throughout the research. Many pieces of evidence discussed the need for pre-existing relationships to be in place before the research starts. Barriers to achieving equitable partnerships predominantly include time and funding constraints (mentioned above), as well as inaccessible and complex contracts and legal frameworks, and hierarchical practices around data ownership and recognition.

Steps are already being taken in these areas, including the development of visual and simplified contracts, flexible data access terms, dedicated bridging roles, broadened library access and staff investment, the creation of guidance and toolkits, as well as training for co-researchers.

### **Overview of the barriers and impacts**

#### ***Inaccessible and complex contracts and legal frameworks***

12 pieces of evidence (across 12 submissions) referred to unclear or inaccessible university processes and resources for non-academic partners as a major barrier. For example, The University of Hull found that its standard 12-page legal contracts were not inclusive or accessible to project groups (British Science Association, Evidence No. 186). The complex legal terminology can be difficult for community partners to understand and reinforce power imbalances. In addition, the evidence outlined how legal restrictions on community researchers being labelled as “researchers” due to their non-affiliation with academic institutions can also reinforce power imbalances. The evidence suggests that the time taken to process collaboration agreements can also hinder equitable partnerships.

#### ***Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), ownership and recognition***

13 pieces of evidence (across 9 submissions) outlined how data ownership can be a point of contention. Traditional university practices often reserve the right to use data, which can conflict with the understanding that data originating from a community-led project may be community-owned or jointly owned. Contracts or Intellectual Property rules can force partners to give away credit for jointly developed work. It was also highlighted that sharing data and outputs, especially creative and artistic ones, through standard university repositories like ORDA (Online Research Data) is difficult (submission from Access Folk, University of Sheffield, Evidence No. 217).

#### ***Digital exclusion***

Related to this, 4 pieces of evidence (across 4 submissions) highlighted how co-researchers, particularly those employed as consultants or on casual contracts, often face significant barriers in accessing essential university resources such as the Library and IT systems. This makes sustained and equitable collaboration throughout the research process difficult. One submission highlighted how staff in the relevant support roles are often unclear on these processes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN THE EVIDENCE

- Address the inaccessibility of research-oriented language by using clear and plain language in all communication.
- Provide easy-read options and consider multimedia formats for contracts and other legal documentation.
- Provide co-researchers with access to libraries and other relevant digital systems.
- Work with existing community-based networks and infrastructures to build trust and establish more equitable relationships from the outset.
- Invest in community research hubs or intermediary organisations which can connect academics and communities around particular research interests, and build trust.

## Steps already being taken to address these barriers

### *Alternative and accessible contracts and languages*

The Centre for Equity and Inclusion at the University of Sheffield has created a visual contract that re-imagines conventional legal clauses, common within partnership agreements. It breaks down legalese into visuals and analogies (University of Sheffield, Evidence No. 95). Similarly, The University of Hull amended their legal contract for *Ideas Fund* projects to make them shorter (from twelve pages to three) and more accessible (British Science Association, Evidence No. 186).

### *Access to data and equitable terms*

The University of Sheffield has Terms and Conditions that it can offer to specific projects/partner circumstances to ensure that collaborations are beneficial to all parties. This might include “granting partners certain rights to use the outputs for not-for-profit, public good activity” (University of Sheffield, Evidence No. 218). The Community Knowledge Matters Network (CKM) in the Highlands and Islands also addressed data ownership concerns by ensuring that the aggregated and anonymised results from their ‘Rural Mental Health Research Co-Priority Survey’, co-developed and analysed with community members, are publicly available and accessible back to communities who might want to use it to support their own projects (British Science Association, Evidence No. 186). The *Roots and Futures* project at the University of Sheffield outlines how they removed the check box relating to ownership of data from their participant information sheet and shared all data with participants via a shared online drive. They also produced reports available to all participants after events (submission from the *Roots and Futures* project, University of Sheffield, Evidence No. 48).<sup>10</sup>

### *Dedicated ‘bridging’ roles*

Some submissions emphasised the integral contribution of dedicated support roles that provide a bridge between the university and the community. These roles can help to dismantle traditional hierarchical structures and build sustainable relationships. For example, the University of Bath created a ‘Community Connector’ role in response to community feedback from the ParticipatoryResearch@Bath project which emphasised the need for a welcoming “front door”, opportunities to “build a relationship rather than

doing ‘projects’”, and a visible University presence within the community (University of Bath, Evidence No. 24).<sup>11</sup> The University of Sheffield has also created similar administrative positions. These individuals act as “active intermediaries” between the university and project partners, who “foster meaningful contractual relations”, “funding arrangements” and generate supportive or “boundary objects”, such as mini-project agreements clarifying expectations, processes and outcomes to establish a shared understanding of the project (submission from the Urban Institute, University of Sheffield, Evidence No. 239).<sup>12</sup> These roles often exist at universities, but tend to privilege industry, private, civic partners or larger-scale organisations.

### ***Investment in University Libraries and broadening access***

A submission from the University of Edinburgh Library outlines how they established semi-formal ties with their “Partners in Participation (PiPs)”. As part of this, they provide access to the Library’s space for working with community partners, as well as providing external access to information technology and computing and community archiving training and support. They highlight the importance of investment in staff in research libraries, with explicit focus on participatory activity, such as dedicated Participatory Research officers or staff training (University of Edinburgh Library, Evidence No. 33).

### ***Guidance, toolkits, and training for co-researchers***

We also received evidence of various guidance documents and toolkits to help facilitate equitable partnerships, share knowledge, and address the power imbalances in co-produced and participatory research. For example, the Centre for Public Engagement and Civic team at Queen Mary University of London developed a toolkit offering ten criteria for equitable partnerships for civic, community, and university partners (Queen Mary University, Evidence No. 175).<sup>13</sup> The Brigstow Institute at the University of Bristol also developed toolkits to address power imbalances in co-produced research, which explore topics such as shared language, time constraints, finances and project design (The University of Bristol, Evidence No. 10).<sup>14</sup> The Institute for Social Justice at York St John University is also developing a community research training module to support community co-researchers working on projects at the university in developing the skills needed to design and carry out research projects. On completion, co-researchers will receive 20 university credits in recognition of their research skills (Institute for Social Justice, York St John University, Evidence No. 7).

## **Negotiated ethics**

Based on the evidence, ethical governance also presents several significant challenges for co-produced research. Issues relate to lengthy and inconsistent review processes, inaccessible language, and the inherent inflexibility of ethical frameworks that struggle to accommodate the emergent and non-linear nature of co-produced research. The evidence also highlighted the potential for tokenism in participatory research as well as the issue of visa ethics for partners in low and middle-income countries around the world. Overall, the evidence suggested that university ethics processes can prioritise accountability to the system over accountability within the research partnership itself. Instead, it advocated for a more nuanced and flexible approach to university ethics procedures that recognises the unique ethical considerations of co-produced research, involves community partners in the ethical review process, and provides better guidance and support for researchers and ethics committees involved in co-produced research.

Steps are already being taken to address these issues, including the development of participatory ethics and community-centred ethics panels, internal reviews of university ethics procedures, and the creation of ethical research guides and toolkits.

## **Overview of the barriers and impacts**

### ***Inflexible and unfit ethical review processes***

Multiple submissions highlighted how traditional university ethics processes are ill-suited, misaligned, or out of step with the fluid and emergent nature of co-produced research. Similarly to funders (as mentioned in *Fair Funding* above), ethics boards often demand rigid, predefined outcomes from research projects. Multiple pieces of evidence highlighted how this clashes with the ongoing, dynamic and non-linear nature of co-produced research. For example: “the unpredictability of participatory projects makes them hard to fit into standard ethical review forms” (The University of Sheffield, Evidence No. 140). One submission also highlighted how some university permissions restrict the use of participants’ preferred communication channels, such as social media and messaging apps (e.g. WhatsApp, Instagram, or new AI tools) (submission from *Access Folk*, University of Sheffield, Evidence No. 217). This can hinder engagement and reinforce power hierarchies. In addition, 7 pieces of evidence (from 7 separate submissions) highlighted how university ethical review processes are often time-consuming and inconsistent across disciplines and faculties, which causes delays and barriers to engagement, potentially damaging relationships with non-academic partners. One submission specifically highlighted how “reviewers may be too risk averse or not familiar with the notion of co-produced research and the importance of including those who are the focus of the research” (Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre, Evidence No. 205).

### ***Inaccessible and ‘othering’ language***

Relatedly, a small number of submissions outlined how the language used in ethics processes and participant information sheets is inaccessible and portrays community partners as vulnerable, as opposed to equal partners. One submission highlighted specifically how community groups involved in one research project were unhappy with how the language used in the ethics process was ‘othering’ and discriminatory (British Science Association, Evidence No. 186).

### ***Lived experience, tokenism, and ‘trauma mining’***

15 pieces of evidence included discussions of lived experience in relation to ethics. Multiple of these highlighted how co-produced and participatory research is susceptible to ‘trauma mining’ and tokenistic engagement with people with lived experience. A report submitted by the charity Groundswell, which describes the experiences of people with lived experience of homelessness working or volunteering in the homelessness sector in the UK, highlights how they can feel “mined” for their past experiences and pressured to disclose them based on agendas outside of their control or understanding (Groundswell, Evidence No. 1).<sup>15</sup> The report highlights how some participants felt that they were “rolled out” or “put on display” to share personal stories about their homelessness. Notes from a one-day workshop at the London School of Economics (Evidence No. 113) highlight how experts by experience report feeling misled in co-produced research after being promised genuine power over the research process but finding their participation is limited or “drops off” during the analysis stage.<sup>16</sup> Some pieces of evidence also noted the risk of emotional burnout for experts by experience when they are repeatedly asked to share difficult experiences. Such negative experiences are described as potentially more harmful than non-involvement.

### ***Ethical frameworks for international partners***

One testimony highlighted the issue of visa ethics for partners in low and middle-income countries around the world. It highlighted the visa issues and subsequent financial impact research partners face when applying to come to the UK for research-related purposes (*anonymous*). Another submission highlighted the prevalence of ‘ethics dumping’ and ‘helicopter research’ in international participatory research projects, evidencing how external partners (funders) see co-production as “research on the cheap”, with unpaid community volunteers collecting data for free (*anonymous*).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN THE EVIDENCE**

- Negotiated and iterative ethics in practice that reflect the nature of co-produced research.
- Improved training and policy guidance for university ethics committees to better understand co-production and the nuances and ethical considerations specific to participatory research methodologies.
- A separate ethics board for participatory research.
- Developing adaptable consent forms to fit specific projects.
- Rigorous ethical frameworks for working with partners in resource-poor settings to avoid ‘helicopter research’ and ‘ethics dumping’.<sup>17</sup>
- The need for “lived analysis” - the inclusion of experts by experience in all stages of the research, rather than simply generating data for professional researchers.

## **Steps already being taken to address these barriers**

### ***Development of participatory ethics and advisory panels***

Multiple pieces of evidence highlighted areas where researchers and community partners are collaborating to develop new participatory and community-centred ethics and advisory panels. The Inspiring Ethics group at King’s College London are currently exploring alternative models that could better support participatory, co-produced, and community-engaged research (King’s College London, Evidence No. 8).<sup>18</sup> Some institutions are also currently reviewing their internal ethics procedures in response to criticisms that the current processes present a barrier to co-produced research (e.g. University of Hull, submission from the British Science Association, Evidence No. 186). *Youth Aspire Connect*, a youth-led non-profit organisation supporting Kingston Upon Hull and East Yorkshire, has created a young people/community BME advisory panel for university researchers. This aims to ensure minoritised communities are part of the development and evaluation of research, and can advise on how researchers can engage with young people and communities (British Science Association, Evidence No. 186). Science Ceilidh and their partners are also developing a new ‘participatory ethics’ toolkit which can be led by communities to set the terms of how they want to be involved and shape decisions around University ethics processes. It is intended as a pre-engagement activity for communities to identify their own needs for more equitable participation (British Science Association, Evidence No. 186).

### ***Ethical international research***

Two separate submissions pointed to *The Trust Code: A Global Code of Conduct for Equitable Research Partnerships* as an example of a useful model for ensuring research is equitable and avoids ‘ethics dumping’ and ‘helicopter research’, particularly when working with partners in resource-poor settings. The Trust Code has been adopted by the European Research Council.

## **Metrics**

Discussions about metrics appear in the smallest proportion of the evidence (19.7%). Despite this, there is a clear and consistent concern that traditional academic systems and funding structures, which prioritise conventional metrics and outputs, often fail to adequately recognise or value the diverse outcomes, experiential knowledge, and broader impacts that characterise successful co-produced research. The evidence recommended utilising university Impact Officers and developing evaluation frameworks that recognise these alternative outputs. Steps already being taken to address this includes the British Science Association’s *Ideas Fund Impact Framework*, which is being used to understand the unique outcomes of the participatory projects they fund.

### **Overview of the barriers and impacts**

#### ***Traditional metrics are insufficient for evaluating co-produced outcomes and impacts***

Some pieces of evidence included a discussion of how traditional metrics are often not suitable for evaluating the unique outcomes and impacts of co-produced research. One submission in particular highlighted how academia does not universally value experiential and tacit knowledge, which is often central to co-production. This mismatch in what is considered valuable can lead to co-produced work being perceived as less rigorous or impactful within traditional academic frameworks (University of Plymouth, Evidence No. 99).<sup>19</sup> The evidence also highlighted how the continued reliance on traditional outputs, such as peer-reviewed papers, may not reflect the varied outcomes of co-produced work and diverse types of knowledge and expertise contributed by community partners. This was emphasised particularly in relation to research that involves arts-based methods, which is common in co-produced projects (University of Manchester, Evidence No. 59; Durham University, Evidence No. 229).<sup>20</sup>

### **RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN THE EVIDENCE**

- Working with Impact Officers who support the production and circulation of creative outputs.
- Considering diverse forms of impact, such as aesthetic impact, emotional resonance, and community empowerment, in frameworks for evaluating impact in arts-based participatory research.

## **Steps already being taken to address these barriers**

### **Understanding co-produced outcomes and impacts**

The British Science Association has developed an *Ideas Fund Impact Framework*. This is currently being used to help them reflect on the kinds of change being seen in the projects they fund, and learn about the outcomes and impacts that are possible from community/researcher partnerships. Although this is currently being used as a reflective tool, they highlight how the framework has the potential to be used to measure the outcomes of co-produced work (British Science Association, Evidence No. 186).

# ADDITIONAL ISSUES RAISED IN THE EVIDENCE

In addition to the above themes, multiple pieces of evidence also highlighted the relational, emotional, and administrative labour involved in doing participatory and co-produced research, which often remains unseen and undervalued. In addition, a recurring implication shared by respondents in both evidence submissions and our online meetings was that the cumbersome institutional processes outlined can significantly undermine trust within research partnerships, as well as the credibility and reputation of the university. We also received evidence demonstrating the situated challenges experienced by Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) undertaking participatory research.

## **Relational, emotional, and administrative labour**

Respondents in both the evidence submissions and our online meetings highlighted how the persistent need to navigate complex bureaucratic hurdles (particularly finance and ethics) and rely on temporary solutions or workarounds to navigate these barriers involves substantial relational, emotional and administrative labour. Respondents highlighted how this labour is often unseen and undervalued by traditional academic and administrative systems. Recent research submitted to the Inquiry from the ParticipatoryResearch@Bath project highlights how “colleagues across the sector mentioned there was a high degree of ‘emotional investment and labour’ in their work supporting people to be involved in research in a participatory way” (University of Bath, Evidence No. 22). Their recent report outlines a series of five recommendations related to institutional and sector-level improvements that need to be implemented to recognise and support the roles of research enablers working relationally.<sup>21</sup>

## **Undermining trust and institutional reputation**

Finally, respondents in both evidence submissions and online meetings highlighted how the cumbersome and often inconsistent institutional processes, particularly around payment and contracting, can significantly undermine trust within research partnerships, especially with community partners who experience payment delays and administrative burdens. They also highlighted how the inability of universities to provide clear, consistent, and equitable processes for co-produced research can damage their reputation and credibility within the communities they seek to engage. This risk is amplified when institutional practices contradict the stated aims of equitable partnership, particularly in relation to international research.

## **Barriers to conducting participatory research at doctoral level**

We received 10 pieces of evidence (across 6 submissions) demonstrating the situated challenges experienced by Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) undertaking participatory research. Overall, doctoral researchers experienced many of the same barriers mentioned above, including funding and resource limitations, difficulties paying research partners, navigating ethics processes, and the continued reliance on traditional outputs. However, the evidence also highlighted specific barriers related to the PhD experience.

For example, a recurring theme across the submissions was the inherent tension between the institutional structure of doctoral study, which requires an individual contribution to knowledge, typically presented through a sole-authored thesis, and the collaborative, relational nature of participatory research conducted in and with communities. Multiple submissions also highlighted how the fixed timelines and early milestones of conventional PhD programmes often discourage co-produced research by limiting time for collaborative design, relationship-building, and meaningful dissemination (submission from the Participatory Research Network, University of Sheffield, Evidence No. 162; testimony from a doctoral researcher, Evidence No. 158). There is also a perceived lack of adequate training for doctoral researchers in conducting participatory research, as well as support to build and sustain partnerships with external partner organisations (submission from the Participatory Research Network, University of Sheffield, Evidence No. 162-166).

Recommendations include rethinking doctoral project timelines for participatory projects (including allowing greater flexibility); recognising community contribution as impactful doctoral research; improving support and training for PGRs, and considering collaborative PhD studentship options.

# SUMMARY

There is clear and widespread acknowledgement across the evidence submitted to the Inquiry that barriers to doing participatory and co-produced research persist across UK Higher Education. These issues are felt across the entire lifecycle of participatory projects, and impact researchers from doctoral level to senior academics, as well as professional service staff and, crucially, community partners.

These issues can be clearly categorised under the four broad cross-cutting themes identified at the beginning of the project – Fair Funding, Equitable Partnerships, Negotiated Ethics, and Metrics. The particular barriers identified across these themes broadly relate to issues trying to pay co-researchers, the constraints of short or linear funding timelines, ethics procedures being misaligned with the realities of co-produced research, and the prioritisation of more ‘traditional’ research outputs. In addition to these four themes, there are also particular challenges faced by doctoral researchers engaged in (or attempting to engage in) participatory research. These challenges stem from the inherent structures of PhD programs that prioritise individual contributions and fixed timelines over collaborative engagement, and therefore may require bespoke solutions.

The evidence has highlighted how people are relying on ad-hoc, temporary solutions or workarounds to navigate institutional systems and processes that are not fit for purpose for participatory and co-produced research. This involves substantial relational, emotional and administrative labour which is often unseen and undervalued.

As the evidence suggested, these cumbersome and inconsistent university processes can also serve to significantly undermine trust within research partnerships, as well as damage the university’s credibility and reputation.

While the evidence demonstrates some solutions that are currently being tried and tested, as well as a wealth of guidance and toolkits available to help navigate these barriers, these are often ad hoc, project-specific, or rely heavily on imperfect workarounds.

This prompts continued questions as to whether there are sustained, institutional or sector-wide approaches that can meaningfully address the barriers identified.

# NEXT STEPS

Moving forward, we will take these questions, as well as invitations for wider reflection on the key takeaways, gaps and implications of these findings to the members of the Inquiry. We will also provide opportunities for individuals and organisations to identify any gaps in the evidence base and point us to other relevant material.

This report will then be complemented by a secondary evidence review on the institutional conditions and barriers to doing co-produced and participatory research. All of this will then shape how we facilitate the deliberations with our Inquiry Panel going forward, and the development of our action plan in July 2026.

In addition to this, and after seeking consent from individual respondents, the evidence submitted to the Inquiry will be made openly accessible in an interactive online archive. This online resource will provide public access to the substantial and diverse body of evidence that was gathered through the formal Call for Evidence and Ideas, including testimonies, reports, articles, videos, and toolkits outlining the institutional barriers to participatory and co-produced research and how to address them. We hope to launch this in September 2025.

Figure 6: Co-Pro Futures Inquiry Timeline



# APPENDIX: LIST OF INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATIONS OF THOSE WHO SUBMITTED EVIDENCE\*

## Higher Education Institutions (HEI's)

- Bath Spa University
- Birkbeck, University of London
- Bournemouth University
- Brunel University London
- Durham University
- Imperial College London
- King's College London
- London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
- Loughborough University
- Manchester Metropolitan University
- Queen Mary University of London
- Sheffield Hallam University
- The Open University
- University of Bath
- University of Birmingham
- University of Bristol
- University of Central Lancashire
- University of Edinburgh
- University of Exeter
- University of Glasgow
- University of Leeds
- University of Liverpool
- University of Manchester
- University of Nottingham
- University of Oxford
- University of Plymouth
- University of Portsmouth
- University of Sheffield
- University of Sunderland
- University of the Arts London
- University of the West England
- University of York
- University College London
- York St John University

## Charities, community-based organisations and non-profit organisations

- Alzheimer's Research UK
- Bradford Institute for Health Research
- British Science Association (BSA)
- Groundswell
- Health Data Research UK
- Revolving Doors
- Shared Learning Group on Involvement and Charities Research Involvement Group
- Versus Arthritis

## Funders

- Medical Research Council (MRC)
- National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)
- UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)

## Research Institutes

- Bradford Institute for Health Research

## Government bodies

- Health Research Authority

\* The submissions do not reflect an institutional position but the evidence submitted by those individuals.

# ENDNOTES

- 1 Perry, B., Durose, C. and Richardson, L. (2024) Getting our house in order: improving conditions for co-produced research in UK higher education. Introducing the Co-Production Futures Inquiry. Briefing Note 1. Universities of Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield.
- 2 Co-production refers to research that is ‘done with, not to’ different groups, where participants are involved as co-researchers across the stages of research – from idea generation to dissemination, knowledge exchange and impact.
- 3 Perry, Durose, and Richardson, *Getting our house in order*.
- 4 Durose, C., Perry, B., and Richardson, L. (2022). Is co-production a ‘good’ concept? Three responses, *Futures*, 142, 102999: [doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2022.102999](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2022.102999).
- 5 May, T. and Perry, B. (2011) *Social Research and Reflexivity: Content, Consequences and Context*. Sage.
- 6 May, T. and Perry, B. (2018). *Cities and the Knowledge Economy: Promise, Politics and Possibility*. Routledge.
- 7 For example, see the ‘Messy Map’ summary of findings from the *Synergy project: Co-production of research for food systems transformation*. Available at: [https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/rails/active\\_storage/blobs/proxy/eyJfcmFpbHMiOnsibWVzc2FnZSI6IkJBaHBBD2RtRVE9PSlmlV4cCl6bnVsbCwicHVyljoilYmxvYl9pZCJ9fQ==---b15378496f17e23a423bd0d5cd2ab7267bd7712b/Synergy\\_Messy\\_Map.pdf](https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/rails/active_storage/blobs/proxy/eyJfcmFpbHMiOnsibWVzc2FnZSI6IkJBaHBBD2RtRVE9PSlmlV4cCl6bnVsbCwicHVyljoilYmxvYl9pZCJ9fQ==---b15378496f17e23a423bd0d5cd2ab7267bd7712b/Synergy_Messy_Map.pdf).
- 8 See: <https://thesocialchangeagency.org/resources/payment-for-involvement-playbook/>.
- 9 See: <https://www.hra.nhs.uk/about-us/news-updates/new-guidance-organisations-payment-public-involvement-health-and-care-research/>.
- 10 Also see their Easy Read Toolkit available at: <https://sites.google.com/sheffield.ac.uk/roots-and-futures/toolkit>.
- 11 Steen, L. (2025). *A year of community connecting*. Available at: <https://blogs.bath.ac.uk/publicengagement/2025/02/04/a-year-of-community-connecting/> (Accessed 27 June 2025).
- 12 See: Hemström, K., Simon, D., Palmer, H., Perry, B., Polk, M. Eds. (2021). *Transdisciplinary Knowledge Co-production for Sustainable Cities: A guide for sustainable cities*. Practical Action Publishing, pp. 45-46.
- 13 See: <https://civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk/portfolio-items/equitable-partnerships-for-civic-engagement/>.
- 14 See: <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/bristol/toolkits/>.
- 15 Groundswell. (2024). “It Comes Before Your Name” *Exploring lived experience roles and stigma in the homelessness sector*. Available at: <https://groundswell.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Groundswell-LESR-v1.4-Stigma-report.pdf> (Accessed 27 June 2025).
- 16 See: Critical perspectives on lived experience workshop (2024). Summary of a one-day workshop, ‘Critical perspectives on lived experience in social security policy research’, LSE 8/11/2024. <https://shorturl.at/FQlh1> (Accessed 27 June 2025).
- 17 ‘Helicopter research’ occurs when researchers from high-income settings, or who are otherwise privileged, conduct studies in lower-income settings or with groups who are historically marginalised, with little involvement of local researchers or community members. ‘Ethics dumping’ refers to the practice of exporting unethical research practices to lower-income settings. For more on this, see: Nature. (2022). *Nature addresses helicopter research and ethics dumping*. Springer Nature. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504851.2021>.
- 18 See the Inspiring Ethics concept note at: [https://www.quahrc.co.uk/sites/quahrc/files/content/attachments/2023-07-27/Inspiring%20Ethics%20in%20Qualitative%20Research%20-%20Concept%20Note\\_0.pdf](https://www.quahrc.co.uk/sites/quahrc/files/content/attachments/2023-07-27/Inspiring%20Ethics%20in%20Qualitative%20Research%20-%20Concept%20Note_0.pdf).
- 19 For example, see the ‘Messy Map’ summary of findings from the *Synergy project: Co-production of research for food systems transformation*. Available at: [https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/rails/active\\_storage/blobs/proxy/eyJfcmFpbHMiOnsibWVzc2FnZSI6IkJBaHBBD2RtRVE9PSlmlV4cCl6bnVsbCwicHVyljoilYmxvYl9pZCJ9fQ==---b15378496f17e23a423bd0d5cd2ab7267bd7712b/Synergy\\_Messy\\_Map.pdf](https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/rails/active_storage/blobs/proxy/eyJfcmFpbHMiOnsibWVzc2FnZSI6IkJBaHBBD2RtRVE9PSlmlV4cCl6bnVsbCwicHVyljoilYmxvYl9pZCJ9fQ==---b15378496f17e23a423bd0d5cd2ab7267bd7712b/Synergy_Messy_Map.pdf).
- 20 See: McPherson, D. H. J., Valiati, L., McAuliffe, J., & Harris, T. (2025). Exploring Arts-Based Participatory Research Approaches in Cultural Partnerships with Creative Manchester (August 2024, Full Version). Available at: [https://pure.manchester.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/357038818/Findings\\_Report\\_Full\\_-\\_Exploring\\_Arts-Based\\_Participatory\\_Research\\_Approaches\\_in\\_Cultural\\_Partnerships\\_with\\_Creative\\_Manchester\\_08.2024.pdf](https://pure.manchester.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/357038818/Findings_Report_Full_-_Exploring_Arts-Based_Participatory_Research_Approaches_in_Cultural_Partnerships_with_Creative_Manchester_08.2024.pdf) (Accessed 27 June 2025).
- 21 Fransman, J., & Grieve, T. (2024). *Welfare and Wellbeing in Relational Research Work: Findings and Recommendations from a Rapid Review and Participatory Consultation*. Available at: [https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/relational-practice-and-welfare-and-wellbeing-in-research-settings/attachments/Welfare\\_and\\_Wellbeing\\_Report\\_Final\\_-\\_May\\_2024.pdf](https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/relational-practice-and-welfare-and-wellbeing-in-research-settings/attachments/Welfare_and_Wellbeing_Report_Final_-_May_2024.pdf) (Accessed 27 June 2025).

# THE CO-PRO FUTURES INQUIRY

The Co-Pro Futures Inquiry aims to identify practical sector-wide and institutional changes that can improve the conditions for co-produced and participatory research within UK universities and the Higher Education (HE) sector. This report summarises the evidence submitted to the Inquiry's Call for Evidence and Ideas, which demonstrates the size and scale of the problem and actions and solutions that are already being tried and tested within the higher education sector.

## HOW TO TRACK AND SUPPORT OUR PROGRESS



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