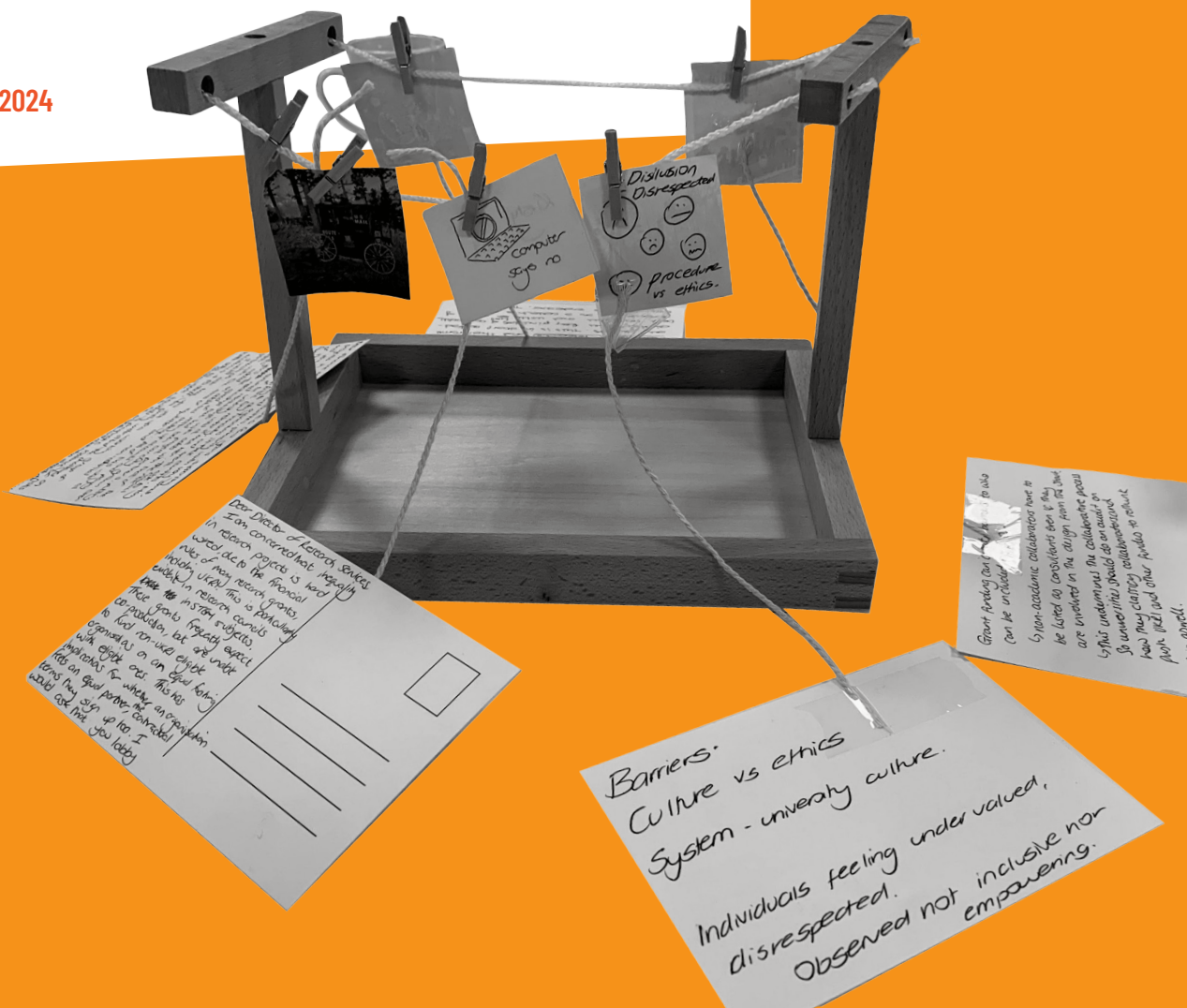


Introducing the  
**CO-PRODUCTION FUTURES INQUIRY**

# GETTING OUR HOUSE IN ORDER

Improving conditions for co-produced  
research in UK higher education

DECEMBER 2024



**“Research and evidence gathering increasingly brings together different organisations – and not just universities but think tanks, What Works centres, the private sector and consultancies, and more... in this country and increasingly across countries. The Co-Pro Futures Inquiry provides an opportunity to reflect on how to co-produce research and evidence in such circumstances of the highest standards of robustness and relevance.”**



**Stephen Aldridge**

Director for Analysis and Data, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Co-Pro Futures Inquiry Panel member)

**“Supporting researchers in the sometimes daunting task of undertaking co-produced and participatory research should be a priority for our universities. I hope that this Inquiry will help in the development of the necessary culture, resources, and methods.”**



**Jane Millar,**

Chair Panel C, REF 2021 and current Chair Board of Trustees for Child Poverty Action Group (Co-Pro Futures Inquiry Panel member).

This report sets out the background and rationale for the Co-Pro Futures Inquiry, 2024-2026. The Inquiry is supported with allocations from the Participatory Research Funds at the Universities of Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield.

Written by: Beth Perry, Catherine Durose and Liz Richardson.

Acknowledgements to: Amelia Myton, Anthony Noun, Anya Watts, Hannah Absalom, Marion Overson, Vicky Simpson, Warda Khokhar, Xinyu Jin.

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# INTRODUCTION

In a letter to UK Vice Chancellors in November 2024, the UK Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson emphasised five key priorities for universities: efficiency, expanding access and improving outcomes for disadvantaged students, making a stronger contribution to economic growth, playing a greater civic role in communities and ‘raising the bar’ on teaching standards.

In the context of a widespread funding crisis, the long-standing debate on what and who universities are for has been reignited. We are at a critical juncture in the future of UK higher education.

Questions are being asked afresh about how universities can fulfil the multiple missions assigned them – including how we undertake our excellent research with partners beyond the academy in the most ethical, efficient, and impactful ways.

This report introduces the Co-Production Futures Inquiry – a collective intelligence-gathering exercise undertaken between 2024-2026 to improve the conditions for participatory research in the UK.

The Inquiry aims to help ‘get our own house in order’ by identifying concrete actions that sector organisations and universities can take to reform structures, processes and cultures.

This is necessary to produce the most ethical, efficient and impactful research relationships between academic and societal partners within participatory and co-produced projects.

**The report answers three key questions:**

- 1. Why are we doing this? (Page 5)**
- 2. How are we going to do it? (Page 11)**
- 3. What is the Call for Evidence and Ideas? (Page 21)**

## REPORT SUMMARY

**The Co-Pro Futures Inquiry will propose measures to address barriers to participatory and co-produced research within universities and the higher education sector.**

Over the next two years this will involve workshops, desk-based secondary analysis, interviews, and a high-profile panel who will identify actions that can be put into practice.

The Inquiry is supported with a £45,000 allocation from the Research England Participatory Research Funds at the Universities of Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield.

The Co-leads are Catherine Durose (Heseltine Institute at the University of Liverpool), Beth Perry (Urban Institute at the University of Sheffield) and Liz Richardson (Department of Politics at the University of Manchester).

**The Inquiry will also be supported by three groups:**

- A Community Reference Group to guide the co-leads and shape the Inquiry
- An Inquiry Panel to deliberate on the evidence and develop an action plan for change
- A Participatory Research Funders group drawn from our universities to ensure we are connected to wider conversations and help the recommendations impact within our own institutions.

**Here's how you can track and support our progress:**

- Join the [Co-Pro Futures LinkedIn group](#) and repost our invitation to contribute.
- Follow us on BlueSky [@coprofutures.bsky.social](#).
- Sign up to the mailing list via [coprofutures@gmail.com](mailto:coprofutures@gmail.com) so you receive occasional updates about the Inquiry which you can share with your networks.
- Submit ideas and evidence directly on the Linked-In page, to the email address, or using our Collective Intelligence-Gathering form here (<https://forms.gle/cwA5h7tATx9ADHYk7>) by 28th February 2025.
- Collaborate on a stakeholder workshop, or other relevant aligned activity. Get in touch if you have an idea.
- Save the date for the launch of the Action Plan on 21st July 2026!

# 1. WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

The idea that universities are ‘ivory towers’<sup>1</sup> and distanced institutions from the communities they serve has never been simple.

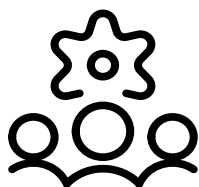
In fact, across the world, there is no single history or idea of the university – but rather an ecosystem of different institutions, fulfilling a range of missions<sup>2</sup>.

This includes the production of critical intellectual thought, the dissemination of knowledge to the next generation through teaching, and – increasingly - a commitment to relevance, impact and benefit for wider society.

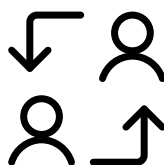
In the UK, the past 25 years have seen an enhanced focus on the contribution of universities to the economy and society at national and sub-national levels<sup>3</sup>.

This so-called ‘third mission’ was met with some initial resistance in the early 2000s but has now been widely embraced and embedded within universities’ strategic objectives.<sup>4</sup>

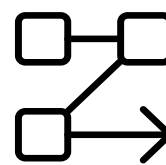
‘Third mission’ activities have involved:



Broadening concern with the roles of universities as not only economic actors but also as **catalysts for social change**, through their ‘civic mission’<sup>5</sup> or as ‘anchor’<sup>6</sup> institutions.



Emphasis on iterative approaches to **‘knowledge exchange’** - instead of a linear model of ‘knowledge transfer’ in which universities are assumed to ‘supply’ knowledge that meets the ‘demands’ of user communities<sup>7</sup>.



Recognition of the need to **consider wider research cultures**, and how **we produce research, with and for whom** – in line with demands for ‘democratisation’<sup>8</sup> and ‘decolonisation’<sup>9</sup> of knowledge production.

Over the past decades, these trends have created a fertile context for the movement of ‘co-production’ and participatory research methods away from the margins and into the mainstream.<sup>10</sup>

The expectation from funders and other sector organisations is increasingly that different groups are directly involved in identifying research questions, contributing expertise, collecting and analysing data and representing findings.<sup>11</sup>

## 'CO-PRODUCTION CAN BE...' GRAPHIC PRODUCED BY NIFTY FOX, JUNE 2024.



Whilst co-production is not a panacea, researchers have been grappling with the challenges thrown up by these ways of working, advancing methods and practices to put the idea of 'doing with, not to' into practice<sup>12</sup>.

A great deal of guidance has been produced to help researchers who want to work in this way to do it better (see Box 1), combining excellence with relevance<sup>13</sup> and rigour across disciplines.

### BOX 1: EXAMPLE PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH RESOURCES

Universities, including our own, have developed a range of resources aimed at researchers undertaking co-produced or participatory research. Some of these also highlight structural barriers getting in the way of effective practices. For example:

The Participatory Research Network at the University of Sheffield is a space for staff to come together to learn from each other, discuss the challenges and barriers to doing participatory research in academia, and re-shape some of the University structures in which participatory research is embedded. This includes guidance on EDI, research ethics, intellectual property, supporting PGRs and creative writing. See [Participatory Research Network Hub](#) | [iHuman](#) | [The University of Sheffield](#)

At the University of Manchester a number of resources are provided by the [Office for Open Research](#) and Public Engagement teams including around co-production, open data and citizen science. At the University of Liverpool [patient and public involvement](#) is a key priority for the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences with advice, case studies and guidance around issues including participation for those with [energy-limiting conditions](#).

Other resources widely used by researchers have been produced by the University of Durham's [Centre for Community and Social Justice](#) and there are sector-wide networks which also collate resources such as the [UK Participatory Research Network](#) or [Co-production Collective](#) at University College London.

## So what's the problem?

Whilst the rhetoric has changed, universities' and funders' systems and processes have moved more slowly.

- Often, participatory researchers end up doing their work 'despite not because'<sup>14</sup> of the university.
- There continues to be a 'missing middle'<sup>15</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.
- Funders often say they want deeper engagement or co-production with stakeholder groups, but lack the tools to evaluate different approaches, or have rules and regulations that contradict their aspirations.
- There are differences in the levels of understanding and practice across disciplines, with little joined-up learning or reflection.
- There are unaddressed challenges when doing co-production with more marginalised groups, both in the UK and internationally<sup>16</sup>.

Despite the guidance aimed at individual researchers, there has been no sector-wide reflection on what universities, funders and policy-makers themselves need to do to support ethical, efficient, and impactful co-produced research.

This can result in co-production falling short of its promise, high levels of bureaucracy, wasted time and effort, and unhelpful trade-offs that researchers have to navigate to ensure value for different groups<sup>17</sup>.

### Many are calling for change.

### It is time to get our own house in order.

We hope the Co-Pro Futures Inquiry can help universities - and the wider higher education sector comprised of funders, third sector research organisations and policy-makers - to improve the conditions for co-produced and participatory research.

We know we are not alone in this aspiration.

The challenges and barriers to co-produced research have been well-documented in academic literature and reports.

Many of the same themes and problems reoccur, particularly around funding, ethics, partnerships and metrics.

In the absence of institutional change, researchers have found innovative ways to work around, or hack the system, coming up with novel micro fixes to particular issues they face.

Some professional service staff are also testing out new ways of working from the frontlines - where systems and processes directly impact the experiences of co-researchers and participants working with UK universities here and around the world.



The Co-Pro Futures Inquiry will gather together ideas and solutions into collective intelligence to inform an action plan for change.

## Will this make any difference?

We hope so, but we recognise that bandwidth may be limited for agendas that are not seen as central to addressing the current crisis in UK higher education.

Universities will be the subject of ‘reform but not investment’<sup>18</sup> over the next years, and there are renewed questions about how they will fare in relation to the Labour government’s new mission-oriented approach.

This context, we argue, makes it more not less important to take seriously the conditions for societal engagement and improve the effectiveness of partnerships and civic engagement with communities.

This means a focus on efficiency - not as a cost-cutting exercise but as a way to ensure that we can deliver value to different groups that are working with us, and free up researchers’ time to meet the multiple expectations upon them.

This has been recognised by Universities UK who themselves have been emphasising the value of the sector in their 2024 report to suggest practical actions to address economic and social disparities across the UK<sup>19</sup>.

This is why we have also adopted the ‘Inquiry’ approach, bringing together those people with direct experience of co-produced research with those in positions of authority to make change happen (see Section 2).

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**“We believe in the value of the research in our universities which illuminates our past and explains our present as well as shapes our future: that tells us who we are, that challenges us to face the truth not simply to wrap ourselves in myth, that evidences the decisions we need to make for today and tomorrow, that sees expertise not as the enemy of our people, but as their strength”**

**Bridget Phillipson**, Speech at Universities UK Conference, September 2023

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## Why us?

We have spent the last two decades undertaking live action projects to test the strengths and limits of co-production (see Box 2).

This has given us direct experience of the gap between rhetorical commitment to more engaged ways of undertaking research and wider funding and institutional environments.

We have become critical advocates for co-produced and participatory methods, with a focus on power, politics and pragmatism<sup>20</sup>.

There is a need for robust ecosystems of different research methodologies and approaches that are fit for purpose and relate to the theoretical or empirical challenges they are addressing.



Co-production is not always a better way to do research, depending on the topic and whether there is real scope for co-researchers to influence the design, delivery and impact of the work.<sup>21</sup>

However, for those that want to work in this way, systems, cultures and processes could be much more aligned - to remove ethical contradictions<sup>22</sup>, simplify wasteful processes for researchers and partners, and evaluate work fairly.

Moreover, improving the conditions for co-produced and participatory research will have knock-on effects across the full spectrum of activities undertaken by researchers, teams responsible for regional, civic and public engagement, and research culture leads.

By aligning institutional and sector conditions to enable the deepest forms of engagement with partners, we will have better environments for everyone to do their work in an ethical, efficient and impactful way.

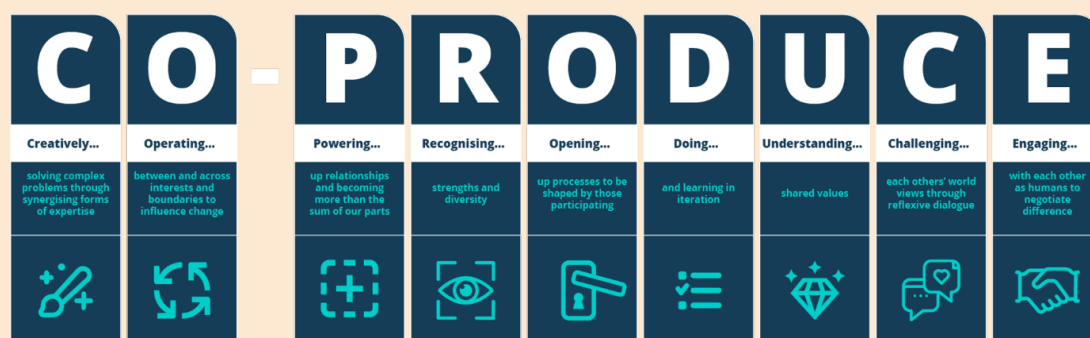
## BOX 2: AN EXAMPLE OF OUR WORK: JAM AND JUSTICE (2016-2019)

Jam and Justice was a 4-year project funded by the ESRC Urban Transformations programme and Mistra Urban Futures (2016-2020). The project set out to create a unique space for social innovation to co-produce, test and learn from new ways of governing cities. ‘Jam’ meant bringing together different partners in the city to innovate to address shared problems. ‘Justice’ was about re-connecting with those who have been disenfranchised and excluded from the search for solutions. We were particularly interested in the value and practice of co-production to address complex urban problems. Our approach aimed to test ways to bring different groups together to achieve fairer and more inclusive outcomes.

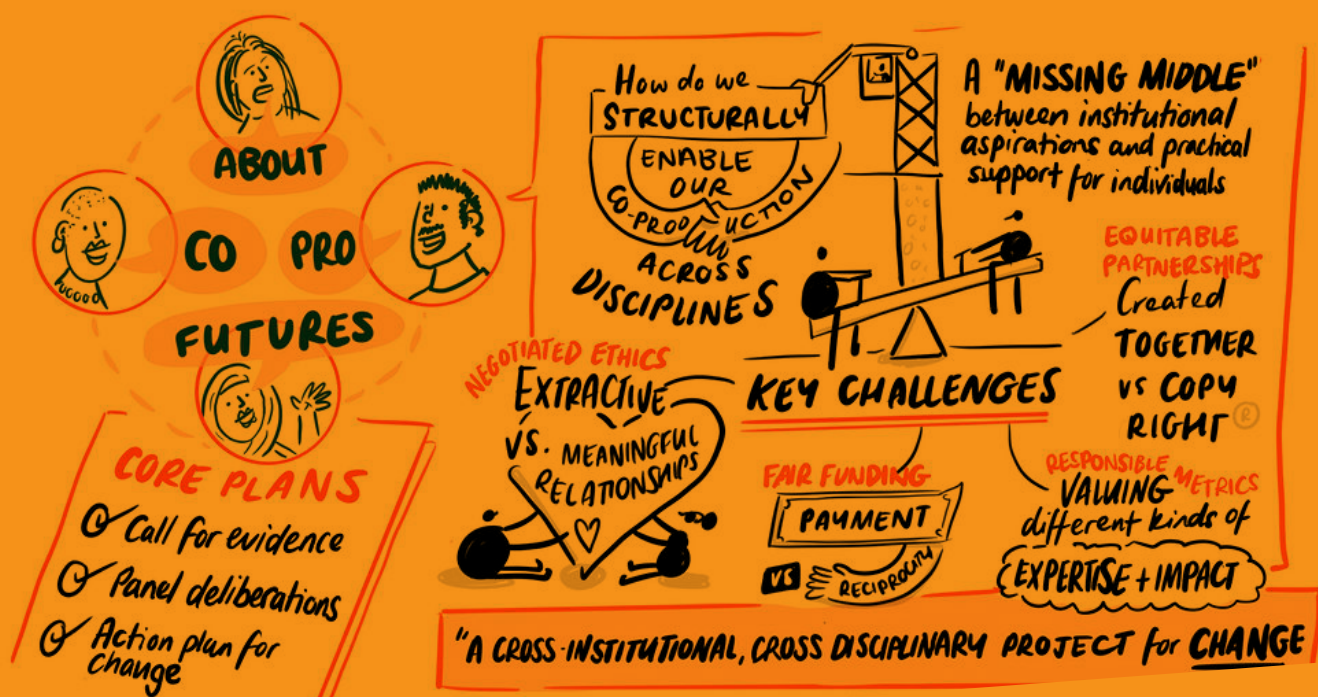


The Jam and Justice research methodology brought together academic and non-academic researchers – with different knowledge, skills and resources interested in making devolution matter in Greater Manchester – to test and learn about the theory and practice of co-production in research. Known as the “Action Research Collective”, the group’s primary role was to initiate, develop and undertake comparative learning from Jam and Justice’s action research projects. We identified a number of key principles which are reflected in the acronym ‘Co-Produce’.

[Read our final report here.](#)



‘Co-Produce’: Principles from Jam and Justice (Graphic produced by Creative Concern, 2019)



THE  
**CO-PRO**  
**FUTURES**  
INQUIRY



"The Co-Pro Futures Inquiry is an opportunity for universities and the higher education sector more widely to get our own house in order so we can realise our ambitions for co-producing research"

**Catherine Durose**

Co-leader, Co-Pro Futures Inquiry

## 2. HOW ARE WE GOING TO DO IT?

The Co-Pro Futures Inquiry aims to harness collective intelligence on how to “get our house in order” to support co-produced research.

Scholarship on co-production has critically engaged with its strengths, limitations and methods.

We want to build on and move past well-documented problems to identify practical sector-wide and institutional changes that can improve conditions for co-produced research.

We will do this through six stages (see Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1: CO-PRO FUTURES INQUIRY TIMELINE**



## What will the Inquiry look at?

The Inquiry will focus on:

- 1. Co-production** – 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. The Inquiry can also learn from the experiences of those undertaking a wider spectrum of participatory research methods.
- 2. Research** – there are many ways that universities work with partners, including through public engagement, student volunteering, curriculum development and review, or the wider ‘civic’ mission. However, our focus is on ‘research’ specifically and how to support co-researchers’ involvement in projects.
- 3. The UK** – the focus is on the changes the UK higher education sector needs to make. This includes understanding and improving the conditions for UK universities and funders to set up and deliver equitable partnerships for co-production with international organisations.
- 4. Interdisciplinarity** – there are varied traditions of participation in research across all disciplines, and co-production is articulated differently in the social sciences, arts and humanities, health and medical fields and environmental science, for instance. Institutional and sector reforms will need to be sensitive to differences across disciplines.
- 5. The plurality of co-researcher communities** – co-produced research can involve many groups, including peer, community, practice, business or policy co-researchers, and organisations. Partner groups face different challenges in navigating university systems and processes, particularly smaller voluntary or community organisations. Co-researchers are also drawn across different sectors including health, public policy, culture and the environment, for instance. Proposed changes also need to account for the plurality of co-researcher communities.

**This is an ambitious agenda.**

We will therefore focus on four cross-cutting themes to look across the evidence and ideas we generate (see Box 3):



**FAIR  
FUNDING**



**EQUITABLE  
PARTNERSHIPS**



**RESPONSIBLE  
METRICS**



**NEGOTIATED  
ETHICS**

## BOX 3: 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.

We have already tested these themes in two workshops.

In June 2024 we held a workshop in Sheffield to introduce the Inquiry to researchers drawn primarily from the Universities of Sheffield, Liverpool and Manchester.

We invited the 60+ participants to 'air their dirty laundry in public', identifying challenges they had experienced in the field which related to specific processes or structures within their own universities.

They then wrote postcards to the person or team that might be able to address the problem – most often the Directors of Finance and Operation, Directors of Research, or UKRI/funding bodies.

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**"As project manager, coming up against institutional barriers feels like quite an isolating thing. I have the support of the team. But to know this is an experience that other people have at other institutions and we can do something collective about it [is great]. We need enough people knocking on the door saying, can we discuss this please? And it's not just one annoying person. I'm so used to be the one annoying person."**

**Workshop participant, June 2024**

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one of the key issues I have - and still - encountered in doing co-productive and collaborative research is the academic culture around research leadership and authorship as being limited to one individual researcher and their name as outputs. This is in sharp contradiction with key principles of co-productive research and with the idea of knowledge as a collective and collaborative endeavour. The main



Dear Director of Research Services,  
I am concerned that inequality in research projects is hard-wired, due to the financial rules of many research grants, including UKRI. This is particularly evident in research councils' exhibit in research subjects. These grants frequently expect co-production, but are unable to fund non-UKRI eligible organisations or non-UKRI eligible ones. This has implications for whether an organisation feels an equal partner, contractual terms they sign up to, if would ask this - you lobby

'Airing our dirty laundry': Images from workshop in Sheffield, June 2024.

The workshop highlighted that people often feel 'isolated' trying to navigate different systems and processes.

Yet there are a vast range of similar experiences across multiple organisations, sectors and disciplines and knowledge of how institutional conditions support or limit co-produced research.

The June workshop revealed the creativity and imagination that researchers and professional services staff show when coming up with ways to do co-produced or participatory research in systems that are not designed for it.

This theme was picked up in the second workshop in September 2024, which was part of 'MethodsCon' 2024, organised by the National Centre for Research Methods in Manchester.

Co-production requires navigating diverse structures, cultures, and levels of bureaucracy across different organisations.

This demands understanding formal structures and systems and recognising the informal practices that enable researchers to get things done.

## Who is involved?

We three – Beth, Catherine and Liz – are co-leading the Inquiry drawing on our long-standing expertise and collaboration and driven by our commitment to use our positions to support better conditions for others starting out on their research journeys.

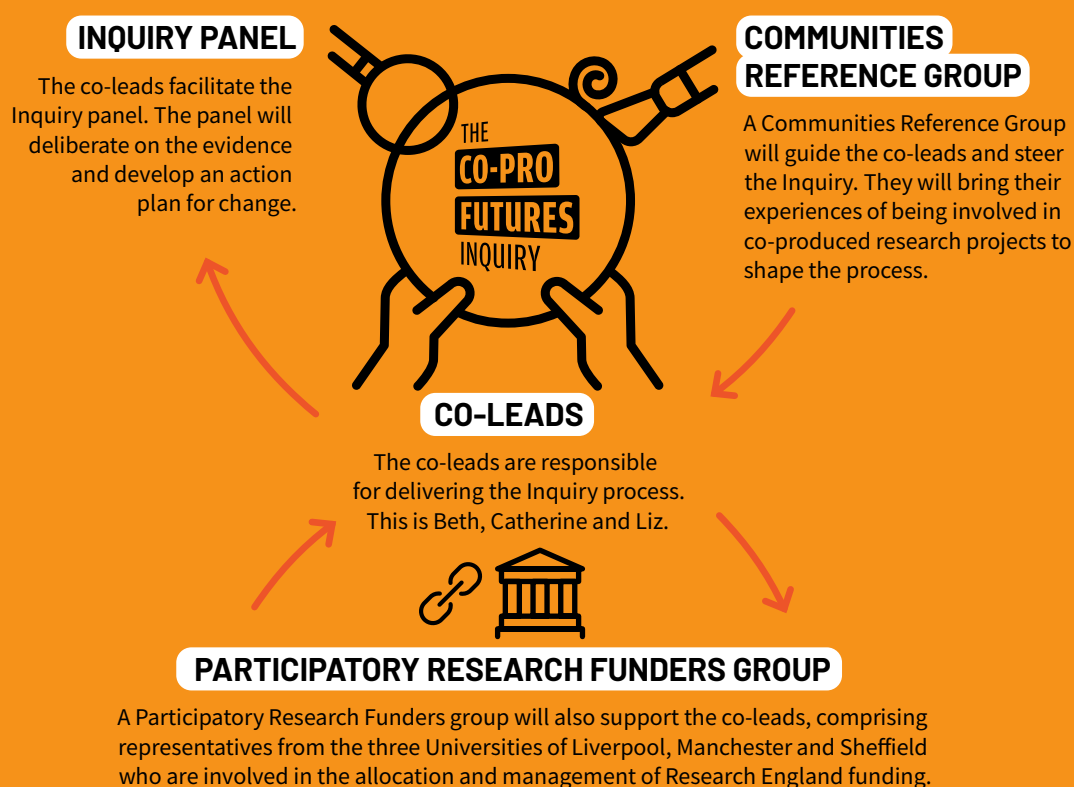
We have convened three groups to help us deliver the Inquiry (see Figure 2).

The **Community Reference Group** includes individuals with expertise in co-producing research with university partners, and who have been engaged in bringing lived experience to the research process. They include individuals from organisations such as Manchester Settlement, Homebaked Community Land Trust in Liverpool, Rekindle Foundation, Sheffield's Women in Community Action in Arbourthorne and Community Pride CIC in Salford.

The Community Reference group will guide us as we facilitate the **Inquiry panel**. The panel represents key stakeholders, with influence and credibility to help secure traction/ impact, including UKRI funders, research users, policy partners, infrastructure organisations, and leading experts on key issues such as metrics, ethics and decolonisation. Panel members have been chosen to bring together those with the power, systems knowledge and influence to hold the higher education sector to account to deliver on its own ambitions for the co-production of research.

The Inquiry is also supported by a **Participatory Research Funders** group, comprised of colleagues in key research, research management and development roles at our respective institutions. This group will steer the Co-Leads, ensure we are connected to wider institutional conversations and will help the Inquiry's recommendations 'land' and impact within our own institutions.

**FIGURE 2: THE GOVERNANCE OF THE INQUIRY**





## WHO IS INVOLVED IN THE CO-PRO FUTURES INQUIRY?

### THE CO-LEADS

**Catherine Durose:** Catherine is Professor of Public Policy and Co-Director of the University of Liverpool's Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place. She has written about and undertaken co-produced research over the last fifteen years, alongside her broader interests in public policy, governance and participation. She has recently been elected as a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences.

**Beth Perry:** Beth is Director of the Urban Institute and Professor of Urban Epistemics, University of Sheffield. Beth's work on urban epistemics focuses on the politics and practices of knowledge production in society and its potential for place-based transformation. She started her career looking at the roles of universities in urban development and has written widely on these topics.

**Liz Richardson:** Liz is Professor of Public Administration, Head of Politics, University of Manchester. She researches questions of public administration and public policy, particularly citizen participation in shaping policy and services. She has been an advisor to over 30 policy and practice organisations, including central government departments, local government bodies, and community and voluntary sector organisations.

### THE COMMUNITY REFERENCE GROUP

**Adrian Ball:** Adrian has been the Chief Executive of the Manchester Settlement charity for 10 years. This work involves leading the multi service teams that combine to deliver a place and community focussed service offer, Early Years, Family Support, Youth, Community Health Creation, Adult Services, Housing and Asylum Seekers support. Adrian uses his 30 years of charity leadership experience in his work providing consultancy support to other charities, council and health authorities. He is a trustee of several local community organisations, and Vice Chair of Trustees at Locality.

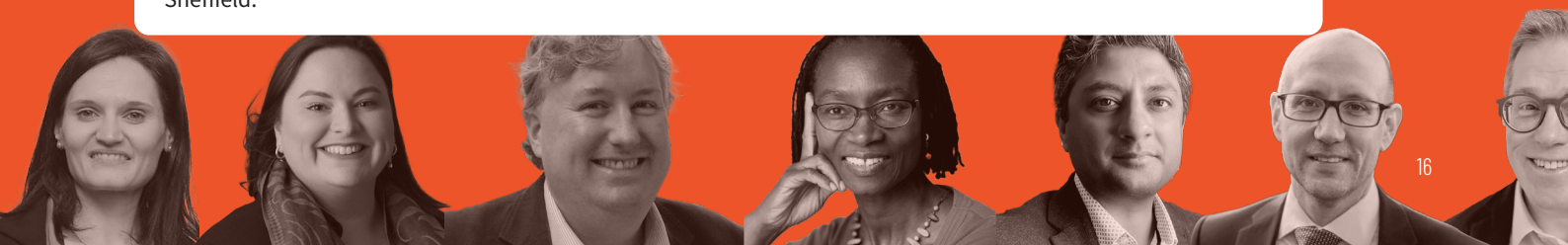
**Britt Jurgensen:** Britt is an activist, artist and creative facilitator working within social movements (re)claiming common ownership of housing, land and energy. Britt is a co-founder of Homebaked Community Land Trust and co-operative bakery in her own neighbourhood in Anfield, Liverpool. She played an integral role in developing the project into an international flagship for community-led and owned regeneration. She formats and facilitates participatory planning, design and build and storytelling processes with local residents and enables co-production between multiple public, civic and private stakeholders in the area.

**Catherine Greig:** Catherine is Director at make:good where she devises and delivers community engagement that involves local people in local change in a way that is both meaningful and genuine. She collaboratively develops tailored engagement strategies, delivering activities that are appropriate to the local context, with a healthy dose of joyfulness, whilst ensuring that people are informed, involved and have influence over the future of their local area.

**Ellie Loughnan:** Ellie is Director of the Rekindle Foundation where she utilises three decades of experience in the education sector to support Rekindle's focus to transform experiences and outcomes for those most disadvantaged by current systems. She leads groups of schools in shared development and supports improvement at a local authority level.

**Georgie Mitchell:** Georgie Mitchell is a Volunteer Coordinator at Arbourthorne Community Primary School in Sheffield where she is responsible for coordinating the volunteering project, supporting the work around food and running a Community Fridge from the school. Georgie is also a member of Women in Community Action Arbourthorne (WICAA) - a group of local women from Arbourthorne, Sheffield, who get together to try and make the community a better place to live.

**Mubarak Hassan:** Mubarak is a Community Services Officer for Sheffield City Council. He has over 25 years' experience of working with communities and has a real passion for community development and co-production. He has co-designed and delivered Community Cohesion work in Sheffield and Northern Ireland, and has previously chaired the Sheffield BME Network and co-Chaired Sheffield Cohesion Advisory Group and co-founded Cohesion Sheffield.



**Paul Maher:** Paul is the Director of Strategic Partnerships and Alliances at The Children's Society, and has been actively employed in Children, Young People and Family Services for over 30 years, working in a variety of settings, including voluntary and statutory. He has a history of developing quality impactful services for children and young people and has been involved in co-produced research with academics and vulnerable young people.

**Sarah Whitehead:** Sarah is the Co-Director of Community Pride CIC and Community Facilitator of Social Change and Inclusion. Sarah is a lived experience leader based in Salford. Working directly with communities that experience socio-economic exclusion and barriers to participation, Sarah facilitates conversations, civic interactions and community empowerment programmes such as Salford Poverty Truth Commission that support those impacted by issues such as poverty to take action together with civic leaders.

**Sophie King:** Sophie is the Director of Community Led Action and Savings Support (CLASS). CLASS is a registered charity which provides professional support to the groups and networks affiliated with Community Savers: a women-led movement of neighbourhood associations taking action on poverty and inequality inspired by Shack/Slum Dwellers International. CLASS is committed to supporting, developing, and facilitating majority women-led community and co-production processes focused on poverty reduction.

**Susanne Martikke:** Susanne is Research Lead at GMCVO, where she manages and conducts a large number of qualitative research projects – often in partnership with academics. Susanne hosts the GM Third Sector Research Network to enable peer learning and networking among the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) research community in Greater Manchester.

THE  
**CO-PRO**  
**FUTURES**  
INQUIRY

**"Much of the guidance to support co-produced research is aimed at individual academics, working out in the field. I want the Inquiry to plug the 'missing middle' between researchers and institutions through sector-wide action aimed at enabling better conditions and cultures for engaged researchers to do excellent work that makes a difference"**

**Beth Perry**  
Co-leader, Co-Pro Futures Inquiry



## THE INQUIRY PANEL

**Al Mathers:** Having worked across the academic, charitable and practice sectors for over 20 years, Al helps organisations define their strategic approach to social change, build their research and evaluation capabilities, and embed inclusive and participatory approaches. She has held national leadership roles in the charitable sector for over 10 years, including Director of Research at The Young Foundation, Director of Research and Learning at The RSA and Head of Research at Good Things Foundation. Before moving to the charity sector Al worked in academia, where her work focused on research partnerships with underrepresented groups redesigning participatory approaches to landscape architecture and urban design. Al is committed to cross sector impact, and improving understanding and collaboration between policymakers, academia, businesses and charities.

**Andy Mycock:** Andy is Chief Policy Fellow for Yorkshire and Humber Policy Engagement and Research Network (Y-PERN), University of Leeds. Y-PERN is an innovative regional academic policy engagement network which includes all the universities and local and combined authorities across the region. He is a political scientist who specialises in applied research and public policy, the politics of devolution, and democratic and community engagement.

**Ann Phoenix:** Ann is Professor of Psychosocial Studies at the Institute of Education, University College London. She is known for her work on social identities, psychosocial processes, parenting and youth, and is a Fellow of the British Academy and Academy of Social Sciences. She has played a leading role in increasing understanding of racialised social identities and their development over time and is a Trustee for the Nuffield Foundation.

**Annette Bramley:** Since 2018 Annette has been Director and 'Chief Collaboration Officer' of the N8 Research Partnership - the strongest university research alliance in the UK. As one of the UK's foremost experts in research culture she has become a regular, compelling and in demand speaker on the subject. A graduate of Oxford University, her particular niche is bringing together people from different backgrounds to work on research that has a tangible, genuine and long-lasting impact on the world.

**Chris Manion:** Chris is Head of Grants at the British Science Association (BSA) and has responsibility for delivering The Ideas Fund, which is piloting a new way of supporting communities to work in partnership with researchers. Chris has over 15 years' experience in delivering grant making programmes both in the UK and internationally, ranging from a £240m programme designing and building youth centres across England, to supporting livelihoods for disabled people in East Africa. He's passionate about how funding practice needs to change in order to achieve long-term impact.

**Emily Morrison:** Emily is the Director of Sustainability and Just Transition at the Young Foundation and has expertise in designing, leading and brokering partnerships, tools and impact frameworks to drive social, environmental and place-based impact. She has led research and engagement projects that critically examine research themes integral to building more equitable thriving communities.

**Jaideep Gupta:** Jaideep is the Director of Research, Strategy and Innovation, UK Research and Innovation Arts and Humanities Research Council and Fellow of the Institute of Development Studies, UK. He brings intellectual leadership to the development and delivery of a coherent strategy for research and innovation at AHRC, and contributes to building an inclusive research and innovation system for the UK, one that connects discovery to prosperity and public good. Critical to this are the relationships across disciplinary and sectoral boundaries, which are themselves woven across the UK, and internationally.

**James Canton:** James is Deputy Director of Public Policy and Engagement at the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). James joined the ESRC in October 2020 to lead work that aims to better connect research capability and evidence with policy issues, challenges and questions. Prior to this, James was a Senior Strategic Resilience Adviser at the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

**James Wilsdon:** James is a Professor of Research Policy at UCL, and Executive Director of the Research on Research Institute (RoRI) - which was founded in 2019 by an international consortium of research funders and meta-researchers. By turning the tools of research back on the research enterprise itself, RoRI's mission is to accelerate transformational research on research systems, cultures and decision-making.

**Jamie Arrowsmith:** Jamie was appointed Director of Universities UK International (UUKi) in November 2022. Prior to taking on this role, Jamie led Universities UK's research and innovation policy programme (2014-2017) before becoming Assistant Director for Policy Engagement at UUKi (2017-2022). Before joining Universities UK in 2010, Jamie was a research associate and ESRC research fellow at Manchester Metropolitan University's Education and Social Research Institute.

**Jane Millar:** Jane is a Professor Emerita of Social Policy at the University of Bath, UK. Jane OBE, FBA, FAcSS has long-standing research interest in family policy, poverty, and social security. She was chair of Main Panel C Social Sciences for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021. She currently chairs the Board of Trustees for the Child Poverty Action Group.

**Jayne Humm:** Jayne is Head of Research and Learning at the Local Trust. She commissions and manages research to bring together robust evidence of community connectedness, participation, and community-led change. Jayne was previously Director of Community Development at the Community Development Foundation and has advised on government policy and research advisory groups.

**Kristel Miller:** Kristel is Professor of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development at Ulster University. She is the Director of the Northern Ireland Local Policy Innovation Partnership (EPIC Futures NI) which provides evidence for policy and programmes that support the economic and social prosperity of Northern Ireland, with a focus on economic inactivity and low unemployment.

**Lorna Wilson:** Lorna is Managing Director of Research and Innovation Services at Durham University, and Chair of the Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA) in the UK. Lorna joined Durham in 2017 as Head of Research Development, and in 2021 took on the role of Director of Research Development and Operations, becoming Managing Director in January 2024. She represents the ARMA community on a number of policy groups and sector organisations on key topics such as (for example) research security and reducing research bureaucracy.

**Michael Woods:** Michael is a Professor of Human Geography and Director of Cymru Wledig Local Policy Innovation Partnership Rural Wales at Aberystwyth University. He is also a Co-Director of the Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research and Data. Michael is a human geographer with an interest in rural communities, governance, spatial justice and countering polarisation.

**Muki Haklay:** Muki is a Professor of Geographic Information Science at University College London. He's a leading expert in citizen science, known for his work on volunteered geographic information and participatory mapping. His research focuses on how people contribute environmental information and its impact on science and policy.

**Nicola Hutchinson-Pascal:** Nicola leads the Co-production and Public Engagement team and is part of Co-Production Collective (a co-produced community supporting co-production of research, service and policy development) at University College London. Nicola has co-produced research about 'What is the value of co-production?' and has extensive experience in co-production supporting greater involvement in research of groups not often listened to.

**Noel Hatch:** Noel is Assistant Director for People and Change at Adur & Worthing Councils. He is passionate about bringing together leaders from different sectors to drive change across local areas. His experience spans pioneering local authorities, think tanks and cultural organisations, and founding several social innovation and systems change programmes.

**Romina Istratii:** Romina is UKRI Future Leaders Fellow at the School of History, Religions and Philosophies at SOAS University of London, Co-chair of the SOAS Centre of World Christianity and Research Associate to the Institute of Orthodox Christian Studies in Cambridge. She is Principal Investigator of the UKRI-funded project *ፊደልነት* in Ethiopia and the UK. Romina has 13 years of experience conducting anthropological research and leading international projects in Africa, Asia and Europe that respond to gender-sensitive societal challenges. She has sought to streamline decolonisation and decolonial ethics in research processes and to promote two-way knowledge exchange and innovation between Europe and Africa.

**Stephen Aldridge:** A government economist by background, Stephen is currently Director for Analysis and Data at the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. Stephen is a founding trustee and Board member of the Centre for Homelessness Impact; a member of the Public Policy Committee of the British Academy; a fellow and Council member of the Academy of Social Sciences; a trustee of Local Trust; and an Advisory Board member at the Centre for Science and Policy at the University of Cambridge.

**Sui-Ting Kong:** Sui-Ting is Associate Professor, Co-director of the Centre for Social Justice and Community Action Department of Sociology at Durham University. Her international work includes significant contributions to transnational social work and the Hong Konger diaspora. She co-founded the BASW UK Network for Social Work Practitioner Research and developed a national curriculum for Hong Kong diaspora social workers in the UK. Her innovative methods, such as Cooperative Grounded Inquiry and Collaborative Focus Group Analysis, have advanced the field of participatory research.



**Tom Crick:** Tom is Professor of Digital Policy at Swansea University and Chief Scientific Adviser at the UK Government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). While Tom's disciplinary background is in computer science, his academic interests sit at the research-policy-practice interface, especially focusing on the impact on people, communities, heritage and culture. Within DCMS, he oversees the use of research, evidence and brokerage of external expertise, as well as providing advice to ministers and scientific/technical leadership within the department. Prior to his DCMS CSA role, Tom led the major science and technology curriculum reforms in Wales over the past 10+ years, and has recently driven the development of Swansea University's first civic mission strategy. Alongside his academic work, Tom has extensive independent expert advisory and non-executive governance experience, across both the public and private sectors.

## PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH FUNDERS

**Kathrine Jensen:** Kathrine is a research professional with experience of working in the intersections of knowledge exchange, research impact, public engagement and research culture. She is currently Strategic Projects Officer in Research, Partnerships and Innovation at the University of Sheffield supporting the research culture and participatory research activities.

**Kirsty Liddiard:** Kirsty is a feminist disability studies scholar and disabled researcher whose co-produced research centres on lived experience, emotion and embodiment as core axes through which to understand the everyday lives of disabled people and their families. She is currently a Senior Research Fellow in the School of Education and iHuman at the University of Sheffield and co-leads the Participatory Research Network. Her current project, *Crippling Breath: Towards a new cultural politics of respiration*, funded by a Wellcome Discovery Award, explores the lives of people who have had their lives saved or sustained by ventilatory medical technologies.

**Laura Breen:** Laura is Research Development and Impact Manager (Research Strategy) at The University of Manchester. She provides leadership to enhance research impact and development cultures and interdisciplinary research interactions across the university and beyond. Laura has significant experience in research impact and public engagement, particularly supporting co-produced research, and has led work in these areas across multiple disciplines at four universities. She has a PhD in museology and worked in the museum sector for eight years.

**Stephanie Hayton:** Stephanie is a Public Engagement professional with a broad range of experience enabling universities and researchers to engage public groups for the shared progress of both research and society. She currently works within Research and Impact Strategy at the University of Liverpool to encourage and embed best practice and strategic support.

### THE CO-PRO FUTURES INQUIRY



**"It never occurred to me \*not\* to collaborate with people with direct expertise - it makes my research stronger. But at times, I have done this despite, not because of, the institution I work in. Individual colleagues have been amazing but the systems, structures and processes also need to be aligned"**

**Liz Richardson**

**Co-leader, Co-Pro Futures Inquiry**

### 3. WHAT IS THE CALL FOR EVIDENCE AND IDEAS?

The Call for Evidence and Ideas is one key way that we want to gather collective intelligence to support the panel deliberation and development of the action plan.

**We are opening the call for submissions until February 28th 2025.**

We want evidence to demonstrate:

1. The size and scale of the problem AND
2. Actions and solutions that are already being tried and tested

The priority is 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.

**Evidence** might include: 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 of how to work imaginatively within institutions to work around challenges to participatory research; examples and experiences of funding innovations.

We also want **ideas** for what kinds of sector- and/or institution-level actions might really change the conditions for co-produced research. These may not be documented formally, but relate to people's experience and expertise.

We hope that researchers, co-researchers, partner organisations, professional service staff, university leaders and managers, infrastructure organisations, funders and higher education policy-makers will submit evidence.

This includes those working in the UK and international partners in/funders of co-produced research projects which involve UK universities.

## How to submit?

There are many ways to submit evidence to the Inquiry.

- 1) **Join the Linked-In page and share your evidence with the group.** Evidence submitted this way can be a formal link or report, or an idea or insight. The LinkedIn group is public, so people will be able to read and share what you have posted. We might ask you some follow-up questions to understand what the evidence tells us in more detail. LinkedIn: [Co-Pro Futures LinkedIn group](#)
- 2) **Complete the Co-Pro Futures Collective Intelligence-Gathering form.** Use this if you have a number of resources to share, and/or you'd like to provide more context or detail. This is also the best way to submit any sensitive or confidential material, and indicate if you / the material should stay anonymous. Only the Co-Pro Futures team will have access to data submitted this way. Google form: <https://forms.gle/cwA5h7tATx9ADHYk7>
- 3) **Email the Co-Pro Futures team with your ideas / evidence.** We want to make it as easy as possible to submit evidence/ideas to us. A simple email will do and we can ask for more information if we need it. You can also email us if you have an opportunity for collaboration. Email: [coprofutures@gmail.com](mailto:coprofutures@gmail.com)

## What will we do with the evidence?

We will review the submissions to analyse:

- a) What does the evidence reveal about specific institutional/sector barriers? How does the problem stem from 'imperfect' conditions for co-produced and participatory research?
- b) What practical steps have been taken to address barriers – formally or informally?
- c) Whether these steps were successful?
- d) Which actions and ideas have potential to be shared and diffused beyond individual disciplines/groups or institutional settings?

We will use the evidence to inform panel briefings on the four main themes of the Inquiry.

The panel will meet during Winter of 2025/2026 leading to the launch of the action plan in July 2026.

## Any questions?

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

You can keep up-to-date with the Inquiry by:

- Joining the [Co-Pro Futures LinkedIn group](#)
- Following us on BlueSky [@coprofutures.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/coprofutures.bsky.social)
- Signing up to the mailing list via [coprofutures@gmail.com](mailto:coprofutures@gmail.com)



# Call for Evidence and Ideas

The Co-Pro Futures Inquiry will propose measures to address barriers to participatory and co-produced research within universities and the higher education sector.

Between 2024-2026 this will involve workshops, desk-based secondary analysis, interviews, and a high-profile panel who will identify actions that can be put into practice.

The Call for Evidence and Ideas is one key way that we want to gather collective intelligence to support the sector-wide deliberation and development of an action plan. We are opening the call for submissions until February 28th 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/cwA5h7tATx9ADHYk7](https://forms.gle/cwA5h7tATx9ADHYk7)



**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



The Inquiry Panel will meet and deliberate on the evidence



Launch of the action plan in July 2026

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**"I am excited to be a member of the Co-Pro Futures Inquiry and to see this work taking place to explore and establish better systems and ways of working together to create transformation and change that is informed and led by local people."**

**Sarah Whitehead**

Co-Director Community Pride Community Interest Company  
(Co-Pro Futures Community Reference Group).

**"This Inquiry is important because there is a strong push towards co-production, but the systems underpinning academic work do not support this adequately - which often leads to work that claims to be co-produced but actually isn't."**

**Susanne Martikke**

Research Lead, GMCVO  
(Co-Pro Futures Community Reference Group).

THE  
**CO-PRO**  
**FUTURES**  
INQUIRY

The Co-Pro Futures Inquiry will propose measures to address barriers to participatory and co-produced research within universities and the higher education sector. Over the next two years this will involve workshops, desk-based secondary analysis, interviews, and a high-profile panel who will identify actions that can be put into practice. The Inquiry is supported with Research England Participatory Research Funds at the Universities of Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield.

Read this report to find out more and how you can get involved.

“The research endeavour is an essential component of a thriving society. And yet, if unchecked, knowledge production becomes an extractive, unequal and even an exploitative act. This Inquiry brings a timely focus on equitable methods of knowledge production. I am delighted to contribute to, and learn from, the Inquiry.”

**Jaideep Gupte**

AHRC Director of Research, Strategy and Innovation  
(Co-Pro Futures Inquiry Panel member)

