



CALL FOR EVIDENCE - Interdisciplinarity

About the project:

Interdisciplinary research is of increasing prominence in UK universities and internationally, with a growing focus on research designed to address complex challenges. The British Academy's project on interdisciplinarity has the overarching aim of investigating how interdisciplinary research is carried out within universities, the relevance of interdisciplinarity to innovation in the wider economy, and the issue of how academics can forge a career path in interdisciplinary research – both within universities and beyond. The **Terms of Reference** for this project can be found in Appendix A.

The project includes in its scope a wide range of interdisciplinary research. Interdisciplinarity can involve the creation of sub-disciplines at the intersection of inquiries between disciplines, which may in turn become disciplines in their own right. There are also interdisciplinary interactions that are more transient, focused on specific challenges and which involve disciplinary collaboration without the creation of new areas or methods of research. Interdisciplinary research can also involve the sharing of methodologies to address questions within a given discipline.

The project will involve taking evidence from a wide range of stakeholders, including individual researchers and research teams; university teachers, management and leadership; funding bodies; publishers and some of the employers with an interest in interdisciplinary research methods and skills. A final report presenting the findings from the research will be published in the first quarter of 2016.

This project is guided by a working group, chaired by Professor David Soskice FBA. The working group membership is:

- Professor Georgina Born FBA, Professor of Music and Anthropology; Professorial Fellow, Mansfield College Oxford
- Professor Graeme Reid, Chair of Science and Research Policy, UCL
- Professor Colette Fagan, Deputy Dean (& Associate Dean - Research), University of Manchester
- Professor Barry Smith, Director of the Institute for Philosophy, School of Advanced Study
- Professor Julia Black, Pro Director for Research, LSE
- Professor Tom McLeish FRS, University of Durham
- Mr Carl Gombrich, Programme Director Arts and Sciences, UCL

We would welcome evidence from anyone who works in an interdisciplinary way, even if this is not explicitly recognised at an institutional level or otherwise. If you would like further information about this project, please contact:

Jonathan Matthews
Policy Adviser, Higher Education
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020 7969 5214

Please state whether you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation:

Individual/Organisation

In your response, please also give your name/ the name of your organisation and contact details. This will help us to contact you if we have further questions. We will contact the provider for prior permission before quoting any evidence we receive in our final report. Moreover, please do let us know if you or a representative from your organisation would be willing to attend a relevant evidence session.

We value the time taken to respond to this call for evidence and would encourage you to offer illustrative examples to support your answers wherever possible; there is no word limit.

Please ensure all responses are in Microsoft word format and returned to policy@britac.ac.uk by Friday 26th June 2015.

Postal address:

Policy Team
The British Academy
10-11 Carlton House Terrace
London
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The working group for this project have helped shape the questions below which are intended to stimulate your views about interdisciplinarity. These questions are not intended to be prescriptive. While we would value responses to individual questions, we would welcome your views on aspects of interdisciplinarity which might not be considered here. Moreover, if you do not fall under one of the categories below but would still like to submit evidence, please do so as you see appropriate.

A. Questions for individual researchers

- What broad area is your research, teaching or work situated in (eg, history/psychology/mechanical engineering or humanities/social sciences/physical sciences if more broadly situated)?
- What do you consider the key features of interdisciplinary research? In what ways is the research that you are engaged in interdisciplinary?
- What advantages, benefits and broader value do you get by carrying out interdisciplinary research? What motivators, or specific opportunities, have stimulated your engagement in interdisciplinary research?
- How does your department support you, or colleagues, in interdisciplinary research?
- What barriers and challenges do you face when undertaking interdisciplinary research?
- What advice would you provide an early career researcher wanting to start out on an interdisciplinary career or undertake an interdisciplinary project?
- What provision is there for interdisciplinary taught courses at the undergraduate level at your institution? Are you able to draw on interdisciplinary research in your teaching?

B. Questions for publishers and editors

- What proportion of titles that you publish would you characterise as interdisciplinary?
- What are the reasons for and against publishing interdisciplinary journals, edited books or monographs?
- How easy is it for interdisciplinary research to be published in subject specific journals and edited books?
- What steps, if any, are you taking to promote the publication of interdisciplinary research?

C. Questions for university management

- To what extent do you seek to promote interdisciplinary research and why? How do you support interdisciplinary research at your organisation?
- How do the departmental structures in your university support (or potentially hinder) the development of interdisciplinary research? How is interdisciplinary research best situated within departments, institutes or centres?
- What are the advantages of organising university departments or research centres along interdisciplinary lines? What are the disadvantages of doing so?
- At what point does an area of research necessitate the development of new departments, institutes or centres?
- To what extent, and how, do you promote interdisciplinary teaching and training at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels?
- What, if any, specific career development support do you have in place for academics pursuing interdisciplinary research?

D. Questions for funders

- What proportion of your funding schemes is explicitly interdisciplinary? What proportion is open to interdisciplinary research?
- How do you assess interdisciplinary research? Are funding decisions on interdisciplinary research more difficult than on research within traditional disciplinary boundaries?
- What examples do you have of interdisciplinary schemes or research programmes? In what way are they interdisciplinary?
- What are the criteria you use for drafting interdisciplinary calls? How are these calls put together?
- Does interdisciplinary research (funding?) work differently internationally? Are there any particularly good international examples?
- What specific support, if any, do you provide for interdisciplinary research beyond the funds for research?

E. Questions for Government and Industry

- How do you collaborate with universities to promote and engage in interdisciplinary research?
- How do you make use of interdisciplinary research?
- Are there specific benefits for engaging with, or employing, researchers or graduates with interdisciplinary experience?
- What training backgrounds do you consider when seeking academic expertise for policymaking?
- What backgrounds do you consider when making employment decisions?
- In what ways does interdisciplinarity contribute to innovation in the wider economy?

F. Other comments

Appendix A



TERMS OF REFERENCE - Interdisciplinarity

The overarching scope of this work is to investigate how interdisciplinary research is carried out, and whether the processes are in place to support it, through research and teaching.

The Working Group for this project would like to consider the following questions:

- **Researchers and academics:** How can researchers and academics forge long-term careers in interdisciplinary areas, and how does involvement in interdisciplinary research early in an academic career influence career paths?
- **Universities:** How do university structures and systems (e.g. department structures and teaching delivery) accommodate interdisciplinary research?
- **Funders:** Is the focus on interdisciplinary or challenge based research appropriate? Do current models of research funding support interdisciplinary research to the extent that they should?
- **Assessment:** How is assessment of interdisciplinary research best carried out?
- **International:** How is interdisciplinary research carried out in an international context?
- **Humanities and Social Sciences:** How do moves towards more challenge-based, interdisciplinary research affect the humanities and social sciences in particular?
- **Publishers:** What are the publishing routes for interdisciplinary research, and how do the existing routes for publication impact on researchers' career prospects?
- **Government:** What role does, and should, government have in promoting and supporting interdisciplinary, challenge-led research?
- **Industry:** In what way is interdisciplinary academic training valued by industry?

Detailed questions to be considered include:

Researchers and academics: How can researchers and academics forge long-term careers in interdisciplinary areas, and how does involvement in interdisciplinary research early in an academic career influence career paths?

Detailed questions for research:

- How can researchers and academics (from PhD study onwards) forge long-term careers in interdisciplinary areas, and how does involvement in interdisciplinary research early in an academic career influence career paths? How does it affect the careers of researchers who may change disciplines or who want to move back into a 'pure' discipline? How will more senior researchers respond? What is the evidence base in terms of the support for interdisciplinary research and researchers?

Universities: How do university structures and systems (e.g. department structures and teaching delivery) accommodate interdisciplinary research?

Detailed questions for research:

- What kinds of structures work best? What perceptions do universities have of their role in supporting or accommodating interdisciplinary research? How do universities work with industry, and are these partnerships more important in an interdisciplinary environment? How do universities create departmental structures that are sustainable as well as supporting cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary work?

Funders: Is the focus on interdisciplinary or challenge based research appropriate? Do current models of research funding support interdisciplinary research to the extent that they should?

Detailed questions for research:

- What should the balance be between challenge-based research funding and funding for more 'pure' research? Do Doctoral Training Centres and Centres for Doctoral Training help to both promote interdisciplinary research and provide the basis for enduring academic careers? Can the prize model help meet interdisciplinary challenges? How does that affect funding? In particular, this activity could analyse the Research Councils' cross council challenges such as 'Living with Environmental Change' and the new NEXUS call. How do researchers applying for Research Council money actually engage with these cross-council programmes?

Assessment: How is assessment of interdisciplinary research best carried out?

Detailed questions for research:

- Does interdisciplinary research present challenges for research assessment? Do current models of research assessment adequately measure the quality of interdisciplinary research?

International: How is interdisciplinary research carried out in an international context?

Detailed questions for research:

- Will this move towards greater interdisciplinarity foster more international collaboration, at the levels of research teams and of universities?

Humanities and Social Sciences: How do moves towards more challenge-based, interdisciplinary research affect the humanities and social sciences in particular?

Detailed questions for research:

- On the surface at least, it may appear as if there are some HSS disciplines which do not get brought into interdisciplinary research-is this the case, and if so why?

Publishers: What are the publishing routes for interdisciplinary research, and how do the existing routes for publication impact on researchers' career prospects?

Detailed questions for research:

- What are the publishing routes for interdisciplinary research, and how do the existing routes for publication impact on researchers' career prospects? How will the journal market help or hinder this trend? The operation of the journal market will determine the impact this trend will have on a fundamental level. At present, it is perhaps difficult to foresee in some disciplines where the kind of interdisciplinary research that this trend encourages would be published with high impact.

Government: What role does, and should, government have in promoting and supporting interdisciplinary, challenge-led research?