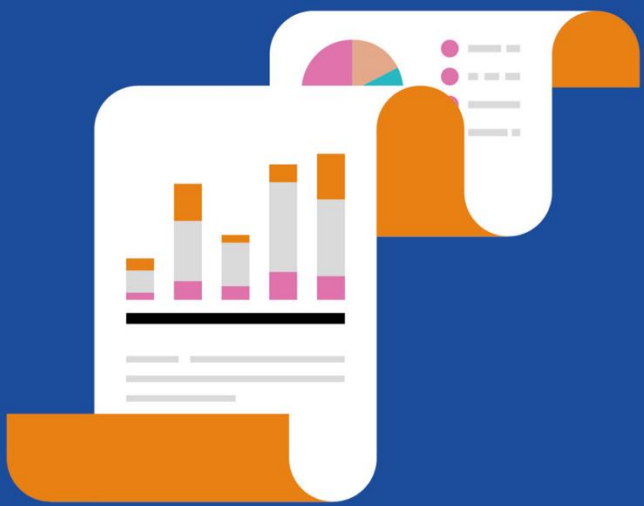
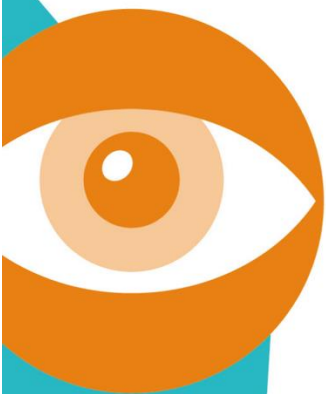


Research & Enterprise

An academics' guide
to real-world
engagement



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Foreword

Our research landscape is changing, heralding exciting opportunities for reshaping our academic endeavour. No more so than in the way that we collaborate outside of academia. Consumers, communities, organisations and businesses want to work with researchers. They see the value of what we do. Embracing co-creation is a game-changer that challenges the traditional researcher roles. New career journeys are emerging that embrace the notion of hybrid careers – where researchers weave in between academic and non-academic worlds. These new career portfolios demand new ways in which we define and evaluate academic success.

The enterprising researcher is one that embraces the principles of commercialisation as a means of bringing about value. This includes defining what we do in terms of impactful outcomes, integrating market perspectives to understand needs and help us develop shared goals with partners, and critical evaluation of our developing work against defined milestones. Defining success might mean profit, but we are by no means limited to that. Instead, an enterprising approach to research helps us to develop the value of what we do. Asking not only what we are going to 'produce,' but critically, why is this of value and to whom?

Researchers are naturally entrepreneurial. We may not always recognise ourselves in this way and we may not naturally communicate in those terms. This toolkit is designed to facilitate the enterprising researcher and support them at whatever state they may be on their journey. We hope that you find it useful as you create your own opportunities on your own road ahead.

Professor Debbie Isobel Keeling
Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor for Knowledge Exchange
Director, ESRC Sussex IAA



How – and why – to use this toolkit

This toolkit is primarily written for early-stage researchers, who are moving from postgraduate education and into the wider world of work. However, the information should be useful to researchers at all stages of their academic journey.

There will be chapters and guidance in this toolkit that might seem obvious to you, and others that are new and open lots of questions and ideas. Evidence shows that researchers don't often have one consistent view on how best to earn a living from their expertise, and different courses in different universities prepare people differently for post-academic life.

So, we encourage you to use this as you see fit – moving about the sections and coming back to the useful bits until you no longer need it. The chronology and structure is there to make reading it easier, but might not reflect the order in which you want to read it.

Should researchers think commercially?

Your years of study, expertise and understanding of your subject is really, really valuable. Not just to you, your university and your communities of research – but to the wider world. If you're lucky, then your published research papers and books will be picked up and used by governments, industry and other researchers to further understanding in the world. But more often than not, research can get lost in translation, over-simplified or simply ignored, as it passes through many hands and many third parties.

This toolkit is simply a guide on how to take your knowledge directly to those who can use it quickly. The value you create with your expertise - whether it is social, technological, policy-based or financial – should be something you have control over. Consultancy and advisory positions can be a really good way for you to have a big and direct impact, whilst also being compensated for the time and hard work that you put into getting to this point.

Your expertise might help a charity, public service or private business to reach more people, shorten a process, make better decisions or create better solutions. Charities and the public sector often have budget allocated for their projects, which if researchers can draw upon, can be used for wider societal impact. But knowing how to package this up, to set a price and to form relationships with the right people can be challenging. Hopefully, this toolkit will address that for you.

Introduction

Confidence

We can't tell you exactly which organisations to approach, or how many attempts it might take to land a commission or a client. We can provide spotlights, worked examples, definitions of terms and some advice on where to start and things to look out for. Our intention is to help build your confidence so that you can create your own plan of action, in a way that suits your needs.

The toolkit has been written by a team of Sussex-based professionals and consultants with decades of senior-level experience in corporates, small business, public services and social change networks. The team includes those who have been commissioned to provide research, and those who have commissioned it. Everything included is based on real-world experience and reflects current 21st century best practice.

There is a lot of opportunity out there, but it may not seem obvious at first. Have a read of this toolkit, try a few things out and see what works. You'll definitely see results if you stick at it. We wish you the best of luck.

The always possible team

alwayspossible.co.uk

Moments of Truth

What are the 'Moments of Truth'?

This way of thinking, in marketing and engagement, goes back to some of the big household and sports brands in the 1980s – when consumers started to have a lot more choice, and a lot more autonomy in their buying decisions.

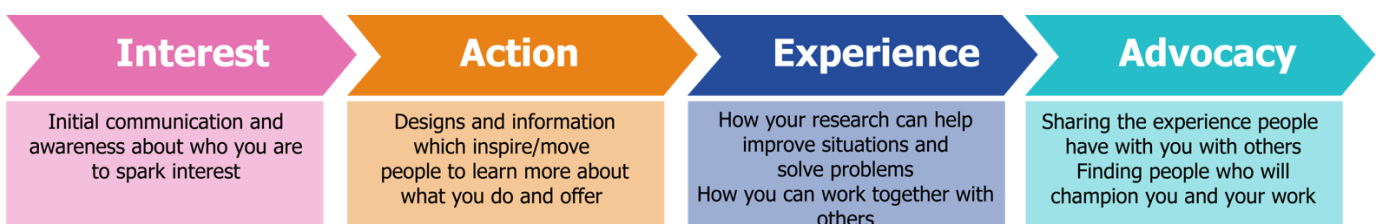
We now use it as a useful tool in lots of contexts, when certain groups, communities or individuals are expecting to make decisions about something for the first time. We find it helps to consider the motivations behind the type of choice being made, and how service providers can make it a bit easier. This model is useful for you when identifying why people might commission your research skills.

Interest – this is the moment that someone first becomes aware of a service or product. They will make their decision about whether it is of interest in a matter of seconds. The information they see, hear or read should be concise, compelling and clear – with a simple 'call to action'.

Action – this is the moment that someone decides to find out more - visit a website, register for a newsletter or schedule a call. They could still walk away with nothing lost, so it is important that they have the right amount of information in order to feel clued-up, but not too much that they feel bombarded or overloaded.

Experience – this is the most valuable moment. When someone takes action, they engage in an experience with the service. If that experience is useful, empathetic, relevant, good value and lives up to the promise, then they will keep coming back. If it disappoints, then they will be much harder to persuade to return after having made it this far and not got what they wanted.

Advocacy – the biggest spreaders of news about you and what you offer will be the people you've helped, the people you work with who have hired you and loved your work. If it is made easy for them to share images, social media, video and to give reviews and feedback to their business friends, colleagues and networks, then you will soon have an army of ambassadors whose trusted network will seek you out.



Moments of Truth



What public sector might say:

We are hard to reach, very busy and our tendering process is complex. We like to go with who we already know or whatever is going to take the least amount of time and money.

We need help with a very specific initiative. How can you help us and what are the next steps?

You have helped us research or investigate a critical element to our work and have contributed to strategic direction/influencing policy and/or supporting campaigning.

Now that you are on our suppliers database, it will be much simpler to work with you again and we have a trusted and reliable source which we can also recommend to other partners, networks and stakeholders.

What private sector might say:

We want to make more sales, see positive results that will enable us to develop and grow. We don't want to spend time or money on taking risks unless it is part of our strategy.

Why should we choose you over others who do something similar?

You have helped us research or investigate a critical element to our work and have contributed to strategic direction and/or securing funding.

Our ongoing relationship with you means that our company has a unique selling point. We understand and value the work you do.

What you might say: (be specific - these are starting points)

I have done extensive research in my field and am the only person (or one of the few people) who has the depth of knowledge and understanding of this topic.

Let's have a chat so I can learn more about what you are looking for and see if we are a good fit.
Who is the best person to talk with?

I work well in a team and also independently.
The work I do has a positive impact and I strive to improve situations and solve problems.

My work plays a vital role in helping businesses and organisations who have a vested interest in positive change and
I can help them understand and identity challenges and/or opportunities to support their aims.

Moments of Truth



| | Interest | Action | Experience | Advocacy |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| Initial communication and awareness about who you are to spark interest | Initial communication and awareness about who you are to spark interest | Designs and information which inspire/move people to learn more about what you do and offer | How your research can help improve situations and solve problems How you can work together with others | Sharing the experience people have with you with others Finding people who will champion you and your work |
| Ways to engage: where to communicate | Social media - particularly LinkedIn and Twitter Published articles/research papers Zoom Printed materials Face to face Direct email Finding and submitting tenders | Social media - particularly LinkedIn articles and direct messaging Email newsletter Zoom Web page In person events and networking Speaking at events Webinar | Social media - particularly LinkedIn and Twitter Face to face (event/workshop/conference) Zoom (event/workshop/conference) One to one chats Talks/webinars Networking (online/face to face) External websites (guest articles and interviews) | Social media - particularly LinkedIn and Google Survey/Questionnaire Video testimonial/testimonial Case study Quote cards Networking/talks Web page External websites/platforms (guest on a podcast) |
| What success might look like | Followers/engagement Impressions/stats Email replies Number of face to face meetings | Followers/engagement Impressions/stats Email sign-ups and opens Web stats Number of quotes/proposals completed and sent | Followers/engagement/shares Impressions/stats Web stats Number of jobs/projects undertaken or completed Number of collaborations Results of impact New initiatives Honing your unique selling point | Rating Feedback levels Referrals Back-links Social sharing stats Visibility (online and offline) Strengthening your reputation |
| What to talk about, who to talk to and where/how | Social media marketing messaging for awareness and interest covering who you are, how and who you help and your reason for doing what you do. The calls to action are about finding out more (links to publications/LinkedIn profile or website). But remember, not everything needs to link somewhere. Direct emails to specific people (MDs / heads of departments etc). Printed and digital flyers/leaflets/business cards/infographics. Attend an event (online or in-person) that can help you understand public sector procurement. | Social media marketing messaging showing your specific area of expertise and how you help. The calls to action are about arranging a call. Build your customer email list and send out updates articles and information with a focus on a specific service and/or opportunity, the aim is to arrange a call. Find out who your specific target audience is within both the private and public sectors by attending and speaking at events, online and in person. Website with user journey and call to action - book a call/meeting. | Social media marketing with a focus on supporting your followers by sharing content that educates, inspires, entertains and convinces. Demonstrate that you are an expert in your field. Attend and speak at relevant conferences both online and in-person. Create and deliver webinars (and/or workshops) for your audience. Face to face communication and feedback. | Social media marketing messaging sharing quote cards and testimonials. The calls to action are about sharing and asking to complete the survey. Showcasing case studies via blogs, articles and videos. Face to face requests to fill out the survey. Make connections with relevant influencers and others whose target audience matches yours. Put yourself forward as a podcast guest, interviews, and press articles. Follow #journorequest. |
| Learning Has this helped? What can be changed or improved in order to get the right outcome | What is landing well/being well received? What is engaging the target audiences? Who are you attracting? What can you learn from talking to people about what you do/how you help? | What are people most interested in? Who are they and how are they finding you? Do you need to improve the web page user journey/experience? How can you re-engage lost leads? What is more fruitful (ie., online meeting booking or LinkedIn messaging) | What has been the most effective or impactful? Has your process and user experience that you deliver been good? Does it need improving and if so, how? What support is most valued by your audience? How do people feel when they see your 'brand'? | Is it easy to find and fill out the survey? Are you asking the right questions in the survey? Do you have social proof/how can you improve your social proof? Are you visible enough/reaching the right people? What is the feedback/case studies telling you? |

How different clients approach decision making

Contents

- [Overview](#)
- [Engagement processes for public and private sector](#)
- [Understanding client differences](#)
- [Resources](#)

Overview

There is a great deal of added value your research and expertise can offer the private, public and third sectors, where there is a natural alignment to core social values with potential sustainable outcomes. Research helps organisations to identify emerging issues they should focus on, and many public and third sector organisations either employ, or commission independent researchers to investigate subjects that affect the groups and issues they deal with. Research can help to provide evidence to support funding applications, strategic planning, policy proposals and campaigning - these are all areas where your research can make a real difference. Working with different organisations isn't just beneficial to them, but your research and projects will also benefit via this knowledge exchange.

There has been an increase in collaborative working across different sectors and organisations in the public sector and there is space, and demand for research and expert knowledge that can help inform a cohesive dialogue that speaks to various audiences. This section of the toolkit looks at approaching the private, public and third sector, and will introduce some key elements to help you in navigating this landscape.

Engagement processes for public and private sector

The public and third sector

The public sector is responsible for delivering all public services in the UK (education, emergency services, healthcare, housing, refuse collection and social care). The third sector is an umbrella term that is also sometimes referred to as the voluntary or civic sector and plays a key role in public discussions around policy and politics. There are also some 160,000 registered charities in the UK helping to make-up the third sector,

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who broadly speaking, are invested in delivering social, environmental, and/or cultural objectives. They are Independent from the government and not-for-profit.

The following list is not exhaustive but highlights some of the 'key players' within different organisations and bodies, that may have an interest in research, across the public and third sectors:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Central government | National Bodies and Agencies |
| Charities | NGOs (Non-governmental organisation) |
| Community interest companies (CICs) | Social enterprise companies |
| Education institutes and providers | Specialist collaborative networks |
| Local authorities | Think tanks |
| Local enterprise partnerships | Quangos (Quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation) |

Local Government

Local government are responsible for implementing government policy and may be easier to engage with than central policymakers. It is worth bearing in mind that much of their key planning and policy crosses a multitude of social science disciplines.

Many local authorities are part of [Local Enterprise Partnerships](#) - a key player in the public sector commonly referred to as LEPs.

LEPS are a voluntary regional partnership of strategic authorities and businesses who play a central role in determining local economic priorities and activities to help drive economic growth, improve infrastructure, create local jobs, raise workforce skills and help boost enterprise and innovation. There are 38 LEPs across England which differ in size and structure. Most will have specialist interest groups, with a board also made up of broader public and private sectors (including industry leaders, SMEs and educational institutes). LEP stakeholders and councillors will have a much more detailed understanding of some of the issues and challenges in their region and a vested interest in boosting social mobility. This is something certainly worth thinking about when deciding where your research and expertise could add value.

The private sector

Privately owned, for-profit businesses cover a vast array of organisations. From a freelancer or solo business owner to a global company with thousands of employees and every permutation in between, the private sector covers a lot.

Section one

You need to tailor your approach to decision makers. How you put together your content or offering will need to be tailored to suit each decision maker differently. Some of the differences between types of clients is shown on the following pages.

Once you've researched the organisation you'd like to work with, then it's useful to draw out an organisational chart with the key stakeholders all mapped out. This can start as a traditional organisational chart (one determined by hierarchy and seniority) but you can also add in a sentence about who is involved in the decision making and what their interest in the project is. This will give you a better view of who to communicate with and why as it should be clear as to who is very involved and who is on the periphery.

You may decide how you'd like to communicate with them by adding initials next to each person, using the RACI model.

This is when R = the person responsible for the project deliverables, A = the person accountable ultimately for its success, C = people who are likely to be consulted about the project and I = people on the edges of the project, but likely to be kept informed.

Your main contacts here with the highest level of communication, and needing your interest and attention, are the people labelled R and A. Keeping those with a C or I on a watchlist of interest for later conversations will mean that you've got all key influencers covered without spreading yourself too thin.

Who are the decision makers?

There is understandably no 'one size fits all' when it comes to decision makers in the public and third sectors owing to the diverse nature, size and structure of different organisations. Stakeholders that you might expect to engage with will most likely be of more senior level, many of whom will have financial responsibility and could include MPs, councillors, policy makers, senior leaders and executives, strategic managers, directors and CEOs and board members, for example.

The private sector may have fewer stakeholders to consider when you are looking at connecting with companies. That said, a larger SME right up to a corporate will have a Board of Directors or Advisors who may also be influential in the decision making process. Each person may have a clear business driver when making their decisions, but also a personal driver. A business driver could be obvious, such as whether the project saves the company money, generates more revenue or addresses a current challenge. A personal

Section one

driver could align to their career progression, how the success of this project would make them look internally as well as addressing the more obvious business elements.

Understanding how and when to begin reaching out to decision makers will invariably take a little time and not be an over-night process. Attending events, signing-up to newsletters, broadening your contacts and joining networks (see section three) will all serve as a helpful tool in navigating this landscape. Another useful tip in the early stages of thinking about who you might wish to engage with is by carrying out a mapping exercise to help identify organisations/businesses where you find alignment with your research and practice. This could help you to tease out initial ideas and even better, you might consider joining forces with peers where you can splice out the areas of focus you share expertise and interest in to help save time and build a more comprehensive 'hitlist'. We've highlighted a few organisations below by means of example:

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Research in Practice</p> <p>researchinpractice.org.uk</p> | <p>Works with organisations to enable them to access, understand and apply evidence in their work with children and families, young people and adults.</p> | <p>Brings together academic research, practice expertise and the experiences of people accessing services to then apply this knowledge to develop a range of resources and learning opportunities, as well as delivering tailored services, expertise and training.</p> |
| <p>The Sutton Trust</p> <p>suttontrust.com</p> | <p>Champions Social Mobility through programmes, research and policy influence.</p> | <p>They work in partnership with leading UK and US universities, foundations, corporate partners and other not-for-profits.</p> |
| <p>Institute for Voluntary Action Research</p> <p>ivar.org.uk/</p> | <p>Independent charity that works closely with people and organisations striving for social change.</p> | <p>From the very small that directly support the most vulnerable in their local communities, to those that work nationally across the voluntary, public and funding sectors. They use research to develop practical responses to the challenges faced and create opportunities for people to learn from their findings.</p> |
| <p>The Joseph Rowntree Foundation</p> <p>jrf.org.uk</p> | <p>Independent social change organisation working to solve UK poverty.</p> | <p>Through research, policy, collaboration and practical solutions, they aim to inspire action and change that will create a prosperous UK without poverty</p> |

Section one

Understanding client differences

Clients across the private, public and third sectors will operate differently and have different needs. Highlighted below are some example differences that are useful to consider:

| | Small SME i.e. 30 staff | Mid-size >250 staff | Corporate client | Third sector Charitable Organisation | Public sector Local government |
|---|---|---|--|--|--|
| Who are the decision makers? | CEO, founder, business owner or senior leadership | CEO or department heads | Department heads, senior managers or C-suite | Trustees, Board, Directors, Management Committee Senior Leaders | Elected members/leaders of Committees, Councillors, Council Officers Senior Leaders |
| How might they make their decisions? | They may act quickly and are unlikely to run a formal procurement process or be bound by specific annual budgets - there may be more discretion in how they engage with you | Potentially seeking the advice of their board or advisors and assessing ROI or value added to the company | May involve a time-consuming internal procurement process unless the value of the work is within a discretionary spend limit | Smaller charities may be able to make decisions more quickly with little or no procurement - trustees have decision making and investment powers. In some cases it may be put to a vote. | Departments have power-making decisions providing they are aligned/support council strategic aims and plans. They will have a clear procurement policy, and procedures may be time consuming |
| How do I demonstrate my value to them? | Show how you will improve their business, increase revenue, become more innovative etc | Show what ROI they will get and how your solution will help them with revenue, efficiency or innovation | Show clearly how you add value and define the benefits they'll see if you are appointed | Show how you can help demonstrate impact and can provide evidence for policies and support campaigns | Show how you can provide added value with research/expertise aligned to local priorities and their communities |

Section one

What happens next?

Once you've worked out who your decision makers are, how do you best engage with them to share your research or expertise? Consider the following steps in order to be as specific as possible about what you can offer.

| The problem or challenge your client is facing | What you can offer | Deciding what the solution may be |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand the specific objectives of the organisation, their aims or the deliverables they're working towards• Identify wider societal problems or challenges which your expertise can help to address | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be clear in what you offer and confident in your expertise• Back up your credibility with similar case studies or testimonials | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tailor your value proposition to really address this client's needs• Work collaboratively to agree on the best outcome and solution |

Understanding the main barriers

Procurement - how do public and private sector models differ?

Procurement is when a public sector body buys any goods, works or services. Sites like [OPPORTUNI](#), [ProContract](#) and [In-tend](#) have 1000s of current live tenders on them. Public procurement is different from the way private companies work because of the regulations and legal framework that apply to all public sector contracts over a certain threshold. The process can also be known as 'tendering', and an Invitation To Tender (ITT) is an official service specification to which people can submit a response.

Public funds are, understandably, under higher levels of scrutiny and there are common, key tests through a procurement process that include: value for money, financial viability, transparency, integrity, consistency, fairness, competition and accountability.

Key stages of the procurement process

It is important to be mindful that procurement processes can be complex and time-consuming in the public sector. However, many organisations regularly commission external research, evaluation and consultancy and tendered projects tend to be quite large.

Section one

Here are some useful steps to consider, when preparing to respond to a procurement process:

1. Building relationships

- Build your network of contacts, so you'll better understand challenges and areas of possible growth
- Be consistent in how you talk about your expertise, so decision makers think of you when key projects arise
- Connect regularly with your contacts and be open to collaborating or recommending trusted contacts when the work isn't right for you

2. Identifying the problem: Creating a brief

- A 'need', 'challenge' or defined output is identified and a brief is developed
- This may include the help of a procurement department or - in a smaller organisation - some trusted advisers
- It is common to have a consultation period, working collaboratively to further refine and shape the brief and agreed outcomes

3. Assessing the market and preparing for procurement

- Communicating outwards – this can vary depending on the size and nature of an organisation
- Some organisations ask for an 'Expression of Interest' first, to gauge who is likely to bid'
- Preferred suppliers or trusted contacts may be contacted first
- Central and local government will have a register of preferred contractors

4. Procurement process

- Organisations *may* gather a minimum number of quotes from different 'contractors' to assess
- Formal tendering may occur or it could be as simple as you providing an informal quote for the work
- You may submit a proposal in writing then follow up with an interview or a pitch

5. Negotiating

- It's a good sign if someone wants to negotiate - usually it means they're keen on working with you
- You may not need to reduce your price though, it may be a good opportunity to clarify the scope better and remove ambiguities
- If someone is only interested on price then expertise, quality and commitment may be unimportant to them - be prepared to walk away

6. Contracting

- For a small organisation, you may use your contract or theirs - it's likely you can discuss and agree
- Public sector and large businesses will likely to have formal contracts and supply chain registration requirements to sign up to
- Make sure you are happy with the deliverables you've agreed and have enough resources to deliver

Accessing funding

There are many different funding streams in the public and third sectors. Unfortunately, there is not one, central source of information on all the different funding streams.

This toolkit has a section on '[the value of networks](#)', as they can serve as a very helpful forum for hearing about funding opportunities that may lead to contracted and/or consultancy work.

Grants aimed at the public, third and private sector are generally published online so you may hear of these via your networks.

GRANTFinder is a database of funding opportunities, but requires a subscription. You can access it for free at your local Business & IP Centre (BIPC). Nearly every county or city council will share information on business and charity funding opportunities in one place of their website.

As your contacts start to get to become familiar with your expertise, you might be contacted if they see a relevant grant. It is important to be mindful that many charities and organisations have certain restrictions on their funding so remember to seek clarity on this.

Private sector funding options

In the private sector, there are many different ways for research projects and business innovations to raise money.

Below we have demystified some of the terms you might hear around funding when it comes to growing a business.

You may not be looking for this type of funding directly, but your research could be a key part of a client's growth plan or innovation strategy, and written into their budget:

Section one

You may not be looking for this type of funding directly, but your research could be a key part of a client's growth plan or innovation strategy, and written into their budget:

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Bootstrapping | No outside funding – using personal savings or relying on sales to grow a business or concept – built from the ground up. |
| Angel or seed investment | Wealthy 'angel' individuals may invest in high-growth businesses with a significant sum and 'seed' investment may come from multiple investors. They will typically make a lower investment because the risks are higher before a business starts to make any revenue. This is called pre-revenue. |
| Crowdfunding | Small amounts raised from a large number of donors via online platforms – you need a good following already for this to be successful. |
| VC/PE | 'Venture Capital' is invested at an early stage with high-growth businesses. 'Private Equity' is invested at a later stage; because the risk for investors is lower at that point, they tend to invest larger amounts, but demand a higher proportion of control of the business. |
| Grants | How you spend a grant often carries strict terms (i.e. for capital assets only; highly innovative projects; or for staffing or revenue costs, not ongoing overhead costs). Only a specific 'unrestricted income-based' grant will cover core costs. |
| Loans | Variety of loan types – start-up funding, asset financing for new equipment or stock, invoice financing and working capital loans available. You may decide on making a personal 'loan' from your savings rather than a bank. |

Top tips on understanding decision making

1. Research who your decision makers are in the organisation you're looking at working with.
2. If it isn't clear who is making the decision, you can ask a contact there for guidance.
3. Understand what the procurement process is going to be, you can ask if you're unclear as organisations should be transparent about this.
4. Ask other researchers who have done this before what their experience was.
5. Find out if there's a clear budget for your work as it can give you more certainty about the work being commissioned.

Section one

Resources

[UoS podcast](#)



In this podcast episode, Professor Debbie Keeling - from the University of Sussex Business School - discusses how to explore and better understand opportunities for engagement with new stakeholders, highlighting the importance, and benefits, of co-creation with non-academic partner.

Gearing up to share your expertise

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Overview

Setting up as a consultant or becoming self-employed is a big step and something that is more appropriate after having many years of research experience rather than early in your career. This section outlines the many considerations and gives an overview of the complexities, providing guidance on what to do if you are in a position to move into consultancy or self-employment.

It is worth considering that researchers wishing to conduct consultancy through the University are able to make use of University name, logo, branding and insurance and, for a minimal fee, will arrange the contract and invoicing. If researchers choose not to carry out consultancy through the University, they will need to set up as an independent and may not carry out the work under the University name.

From an academic perspective, universities categorise external work as either consultancy or a service.

For example, activities considered as consultancy include:

- Providing advice to a company on its research, product development, or manufacturing process
- Being a member of a steering or advisory group of a commercial project or trial
- Being a member of an advisory group for a public sector body for a specific project or activity
- Acting as an expert witness or undertaking assessments

Section two

Activities considered a service include:

- The undertaking of a number of experiments to test a product or process (that does not amount to research)
- Use of a standard process to provide one-off or limited number of products (e.g. wafer manufacture, supply of specialist reagents)
- Delivery of training or continuing professional development courses

For further information on consultancy and services, particularly for academic staff, refer to the university's [Policy on External Professional Activities](#).

Being an expert in your field of research is something to be celebrated and you can certainly maximise this experience outside of academia. Whether you choose to start off as a freelancer, consultant or trainer you may want to look into setting up a business. Regardless of business structures and whether you choose to commercialise what you do, there is another benefit to sharing your expertise – and that's personal recognition. At an individual level, commercialisation of research is usually not motivated by personal gain, but by the academic's desire for a widespread, sustainable, positive impact on society. This two-way knowledge exchange is beneficial for the organisation but also for the academic and the institution. As tangible effects and impact are experienced, this reflects back into the academic's work and their projects. However, commercialisation can be a way to positively distinguish yourself and your work from your peers. Indeed, [there are some institutions](#) that recognise and reward research commercialisation, and build this into performance evaluation and their academic promotion pathway.

It's also beneficial to become 'an authority' and thought leader in your area of expertise. If you are specific about your niche then marketing yourself and your work is clearer for the audience you're targeting. There is an opportunity to explore finding your niche in [section five](#). Some useful insight on doing just this, including benefits and processes, can be found in Daniel Priestley's 2014 book 'Key Person of Influence'.

If you're looking to commercialise your expertise, there are many different options available for this such as:

- Training
- Consulting
- Research
- Licensing

Licensing what you offer is an option as is selling consultancy (i.e. time for money), or you may develop a programme which can be sold in the form of training delivery (to both the public and private sector). If your expertise or research can be turned into an asset

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(i.e. you've developed it and now its delivery or use can be repeated without you having to be involved every time), this could be considered a business asset which others may want to invest in.

For example, your research has enabled you to develop a methodology which you can deliver to help businesses improve their impact in a certain area, you may deliver this work in person. Once you've proven the concept and think that the methodology would be well suited for an app or piece of software for example, you may look at getting investment or collaborating with others to develop this and sell it on to a wider audience.

Setting up as a consultant or business

10 top tips on setting up as a consultant or business

1. If you are working in academia, there should be advice available on this within your university. In general, money will come to the institution to be divided out between research projects.
2. Ask what the payment terms are for your client and whether they need you to send any paperwork in advance of invoicing (i.e. quotes, purchase orders) or whether you have to complete a supplier profile online.
3. Get insurance cover relevant to the services that you'll be offering. This articles on the [Federation of Small Businesses website](#) might be helpful.
4. Consider your business structure. You may want to operate as an individual or as a company. Many people start off as a freelancer or consultant then set up a limited company once they've proven that their business offer works.
5. Check with your institution whether there are any restrictions on having multiple forms of employment or business.
6. If you are an academic working at a university, you can seek advice from your [Knowledge Exchange](#) broker or Business Engagement support office. Through these channels you could receive advice on technicalities, suggestions on potential external partners, Intellectual Property (IP) and seed funding. If you are working independently, you may want to speak to a recommended accountant for guidance at the beginning and acquire a basic understanding of accounting terms.

7. Don't rush into setting up multiple structures (i.e. partnerships and limited companies with others). Test the water first – can you work well together? Is there a commercial need for what you're offering? Don't rush into setting something up that will create a burden of accounting and company administration.
8. Get a business bank account, which will often be free to start with. You can also issue and receive invoices directly to this account, keeping your professional finances separate from personal ones.
9. Keep your financial administration in order regularly – it's better than leaving it until the end of the year.
10. Send your invoices out quickly and accurately for the best chance of getting paid on time.

Business structure: the basics

This section will explain what some business structures are and areas which you should consider when setting up a business. When commercialising your research, you may decide that setting up a company is best for this. This section will explain various business structures and their pros and cons. Dependent on the terms of your involvement with an academic institution, you should check if there are any restrictions or permissions needed around setting up a business alongside your employment.

There are four main types of business structures in the UK and each has various tax and liability implications:

- Sole trader
- Limited company
- Partnership
- Limited liability partnership

Becoming a sole trader

Being a sole trader is the simplest way to run a business. You do not pay any registration fees, keeping records and accounts is straightforward, and you don't have to share the profits. However, you are personally liable for any debts that your business runs up.

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Taxes and accounting

As you are self-employed:

- Your profits are taxed as income.
- You pay fixed-rate [Class 2 National Insurance contributions](#) (NICs) regardless of any profits you make.
- You pay Class 4 NICs on any profits.
- You need to [register](#) for Self Assessment and complete a [tax return](#) each year.

Liability

You are personally responsible for any debts run up by your business. This means your home or other assets may be at risk if your business runs into trouble.

Starting a private company

There are broadly two types of private company:

1. private limited company
2. private unlimited company

A private limited company may be limited by shares or by guarantee and:

- Must be registered (incorporated) at [Companies House](#). You can register either via a paper application form or electronically using a third party with access to the necessary software.
- Does not have to appoint a company secretary but if one is appointed, this must be notified to Companies House.

Limited companies exist in their own right. This means the company's finances are separate from the personal finances of their owners. A company may be limited by shares or limited by guarantee:

- a company is limited by shares if members' liability is limited to the amount, if any, unpaid on the shares held by them.
- a company is limited by guarantee if members' liability is limited to an amount the members agree to contribute to the company in the event of its being wound up.

Taxes and accounting

If your business is a limited company, and the company is paying you as a Director, then it will have to deduct Class 1 employee's NI from your wages and pay that to HMRC.

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Limited companies pay corporation tax on their profits. There's no equivalent of the personal tax allowance for limited companies, so as soon as a company makes any profit, unless it's previously made losses, it will start paying corporation tax.

Liability

For a company limited by shares, shareholders are not responsible for the company's debts unless they have given guarantees – (e.g. within the terms of a bank loan). However, they may lose the money they have invested in the company if it fails. Shareholders may be individuals or other companies, however, shares cannot be offered to the general public.

Partnerships

There are three types of partnership:

- 'ordinary' partnerships
- limited partnerships
- limited liability partnerships (LLPs)

It's a good idea to draw up a written agreement between the partners. For further advice, consult an accountant or solicitor.

'Ordinary' partnerships

An 'ordinary' partnership has no legal existence distinct from the partners themselves. If one of the partners resigns, dies or goes bankrupt, the partnership must be dissolved, although the business can still continue. A partnership is a relatively simple and flexible way for two or more people to own and run a business together.

Limited partnerships

A limited partnership is made up of a mixture of ordinary partners and limited partners. Limited partnerships must register with Companies House but don't generally have to make an annual return or file accounts. A limited partner's liability is limited to the amount of money they have invested in the business. It's also limited to any personal guarantees they have given to raise finance.

Limited liability partnerships (LLPs)

LLPs must have at least two designated members - the law places extra responsibilities on them.

If for any reason the number of designated members falls to one, every member is deemed to be a designated member. LLPs must also register with Companies House.

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Taxes and accounting

- send Companies House an annual return
- file accounts with Companies House

A partner's liability is limited to the amount of money they have invested in the business. It is also limited to any personal guarantees they have given to raise finance. This means that members have some protection if the business runs into trouble.

If you are not sure which legal structure would best suit your business, you should get advice from an accountant or solicitor.

Value Added Tax (VAT)

No matter what kind of business you have - sole trader, partnership, LLP or limited company - if your business makes VATable sales of more than £85,000 a year, you'll have to register your business for VAT.

'VATable sales' mean sales of goods or services that would have had VAT charged on them if made by a VAT-registered business. The standard VAT rate is currently set at 20%, with reduced rates of 5% and 0% for some exceptional goods. You can access a full range of VAT rates here on [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk). If you are VAT registered, you can claim VAT back on purchases made by the business, which is then offset against your quarterly VAT bill to HMRC. Challenges with VAT include overseas trading and also selling [digital services](#). This can become a complex area and one to speak directly with HMRC or your accountant.

IR35

You may hear about IR35 when looking at different contracts or consulting work. IR35 is shorthand for 'off-payroll working rules' which can apply if a worker (sometimes known as a contractor) provides their services through their own limited company or another type of intermediary to the client.

An intermediary will usually be the worker's own personal service company, but could also be any of the following:

- a partnership
- a personal service company
- an individual

The rules make sure that workers, who would have been an employee if they were providing their services directly to the client, pay broadly the same Income Tax and

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National Insurance contributions as employees. These rules are sometimes known as 'IR35'.

It is prudent to look into whether you'll be providing services to a company or organisation that could be deemed to fall into the remit of IR35. Organisations will also likely ask that you complete a checklist or form so they also have a record of where your contract sits within tax legislation.

It is a new and complex area of tax so researching this on HMRC's website would be helpful.

Understanding accounting basics and insurance

Accounting

You should always keep good records of your finances – both incoming and outgoing, but to start with this may be as simple as a spreadsheet. There are easy software options online to help manage your finances and also keep track of invoices and receipts. [Xero](#) and [Quickbooks](#) are subscription-based options which are suitable for small businesses. Some providers, such as [Wave](#) and [Crunch](#), will offer free support or resources to small businesses or sole traders.

Employing the services of an accountant is advisable if you are looking at different sources of income, setting up a Partnership or a Limited Company. They can also advise you on tax matters and especially if you're looking at commercialising your research, there may be [R&D tax relief](#) options which require more specialist accounting knowledge. Note, these are related to advances in science or technology rather than social sciences, but your work may have a relevant technology output especially if you are collaborating with others.

Prices for accountancy can vary so do ask for recommendations from others as it's important to build a trusted relationship with your accountant. You may want to engage them just for your personal and/ or business tax returns or they may also offer bookkeeping, payroll and tax consultancy advice.

You may find [this article](#) helpful when navigating the many business-related accounting terms.

Insurance

Liability has been mentioned above, but how does this relate to you commercialising your expertise? You could potentially misinterpret a project, give incorrect advice, or accidentally share some confidential information. If a client decides to bring a claim against you, insurance should cover the legal and compensation costs.

If you are working with larger businesses or the public sector, they will generally ask for proof of your insurance cover. The standard policies for consultants are [Professional Indemnity](#), [Public Liability](#) and [Employers' Liability](#).

Accidents, property damage, negligence, IT and data breaches – these are all areas which can be covered. These policies can be purchased at a reasonable cost and like any insurance, you hope that they aren't ever needed. Visit [ABI](#) for a guide on choosing.

How to charge

You'll need to decide on whether you're providing a service defined as 'time for money' (i.e. consultancy or training provision). Your time is costed and you may add on expenses for travel, printing or subsistence. You could consider licensing as it's often the quickest way to take a business proposition to market.

As you develop your business, you may create products or services which can be purchased and offer you a recurring revenue. Imagine this as a one-off purchase like an online course, or as a monthly subscription model. This offers regular and recurring revenue for you without having to deliver the content yourself each time.

It's not uncommon to work on a retainer with some clients which means they will have an allocation of your time for consultancy throughout the month at an agreed and fixed sum. This can be helpful for you from a cashflow perspective, but clear deliverables need to be agreed up front so both parties can see the value in working this way. More typically, you may deliver a piece of consultancy and agree on stage payments e.g. 30% at the start then 70% on completion – depending on the length and scale of the work. For further advice on commercialising your research, [this link](#) is very helpful.

Invoicing

One of the biggest challenges for consultants and small businesses is being paid quickly. The public sector will have stricter controls in place for invoicing and payment, however

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the private sector can be more varied. Some will ask you to submit a quote or purchase order at the start – make sure your details and the scope of the work are clear here as you'll be referencing this in your invoice. It's worth spending time on keeping your invoicing and administration timely and accurate to avoid delays in getting paid.

It's not uncommon for a small business to pay very quickly, however you should be protected against delays or non-payment by stating what your payment terms are in your contract. Large businesses may process payments once a month and if you invoice after your work is completed, it could be seven to eight weeks until you get paid from doing the work.

Your invoices should contain some consistent information:

- The header 'Invoice'
- A unique invoice number (reference number)
- Your company name and registered business address
- Company name and address of the client
- Summary description of services provided
- Date of the supply of services provided
- Date of the invoice
- Amount of the consultancy/ services/ goods provided
- Total amount payable
- VAT amount and your VAT number (if registered for VAT)
- Payment terms i.e. days to get paid
- Purchase order number (if used)
- Bank details and summary of how to pay the invoice

Contracts or terms and conditions

Having a form of contract or agreement with a client is important to protect you as well as them. Stating your payment terms, describing the services being offered and any exclusions all form part of your contract. For a small organisation, you may use your contract or theirs - it's likely you can discuss and agree which to use. Some businesses don't issue contracts so in that instance, do propose yours to protect yourself. Public sector and large businesses will likely to have formal contracts and supply chain registration requirements for you to sign up to. Ideas of content to include in a contract:

- Full names, titles and addresses of the company you're doing business with – and yours as well
- The project objectives
- Milestones or deliverables agreed
- Fees – consulting, day rates, licencing etc
- Timeline of the project
- Agreed hours of work or location expenses
- Detail on whether expenses are extra and charged at cost, or included i.e. travel with x mile radius is included in the fee, but outside of area y, you charge travel and accommodation cost

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Understanding client-business rhythms

Most public and third sector organisations will operate on the fiscal tax year (April to March). Some educational institutes may start their financial year in late summer and with business planning that follows through the academic year (August to July). If working with or contracted through a nationally funded project or initiative, they will have reporting requirements to the project funder.

Private sector businesses will have a financial year start and end as well, but this could be any month. Typically this is April or January but it is aligned to when they set up the business so it could in fact fall anytime throughout the year. They will still complete financial forecasting and planning for each year and usually each quarter within that, so your contract may be assigned to a specific quarter for budget purposes. Smaller private sector businesses will keep a keen eye on their cashflow so you may be asked to submit a payment schedule or purchase order showing the anticipated payments expected so they can budget for this.

Some of the terms you may see around the financial year are FY (financial year), H1 or H2 (half-year i.e. a six month period) and Q1 to Q4 (quarter one to quarter four). These aren't necessarily aligned to the calendar year or academic year so make a note of the financial year information for each client you're working with.

Establishing lead-in times and delivery

The lead-in time from initial contact to delivering the work will differ depending on the size and governance of the organisation. In a larger public sector setting, a number of different departments and personnel will likely be involved (e.g. Finance Dept, Procurement Team, Senior Executives and sometimes even Legal.) Be prepared that this is not an overnight process with publicly funded organisations having quite rigorous administrative processes and it can be common for such to take between 2-8 weeks. Business planning cycles will differ in terms of when certain budgets might be allocated/released.

Marketing and Communications

In this section, we think about different communication channels and how to tailor your marketing approach. Marketing and communications is a large subject area and many companies or consultants specialise in working with businesses on this. You can however, manage your own marketing by understanding some key points and keeping your approach specific.

8 Top tips for marketing

1. Blogs and articles are great ways of getting your expertise out into the world. They are simpler than research papers but you can distil the key essence and make it digestible for your audience. You may find it more beneficial to guest blog, particularly if you are just starting out, as this will allow you access to an established readership.
2. Blogs aren't peer reviewed and follow a more relaxed structure than academic papers - no formal introduction, deep theoretical frameworks or critical analysis needed. They are more of a narrative.
3. It's OK to have an opinion in a blog, in fact - do! Key points or top tips are popular ways of presenting a framework.
4. You can cut up and reuse podcasts, interviews, videos and blogs into shorter and more varied pieces of content for social media. Start by following some speakers in areas that are of interest and connect with them or their producer. With a summary of key themes or ideas you would like to talk about, you could approach them and ask to be interviewed.
5. Make the most of any marketing exposure - if you're speaking at an event or have published an article, post a link to this on your social media channels.
6. Use language appropriate to your audience - a senior policy maker will likely read more research detail on *what* you say than a small business owner who may be more interested in *how* you can help them.
7. You need to keep your audience in mind. If you want to appeal to senior decision makers, are they likely to use LinkedIn over TikTok?
8. You don't need a social media presence on all platforms - if you pick two you can focus on creating good content just for these.

If you'd like to complete an exercise on how to structure a blog, consider the above points and you could title it "*How to turn academic research into a compelling blog post*". Take a few minutes to get comfortable with the structure suggested and note down some of the top tips you'd include in your blog post.

6 Top tips for approaching key decision makers

1. Universities often hold wider relationships with organisations from research, policy and commercial perspectives. Ensuring that as an institution everyone is joined up in its approach, discussing potential avenues for research and commercialisation with Relationship Managers is recommended. They may also be able to facilitate new connections and discussions with organisations for you.
2. Identifying key organisations whose work and interests align with your area of expertise/interest and building a database can be a really helpful starting point and serve you well in the long run. Public and third sector contacts should be easily found via the organisation's website (e.g. Board of trustees, Directors, Funding Managers).
3. Join networks and attend regularly - contribute in the form of talks to build your reputation - ([section three](#) talks about this in more detail).
4. A mapping exercise can also help focus your comms approach - identifying their mission, values and aims for example and where they might align and speak to key messages and topics from your research.
5. Ask existing or recent clients for referrals or recommendations to other contacts whom you may be able to help - referrals are a great way to broaden your client base.
6. Keep in touch and maintain the relationships that you've built.

Suitable Approaches

Business focussed publications

Featuring your research in these focused publications is a good way to reach a business audience. [Forbes](#) and [Harvard Business Review](#) are two very popular business publications, therefore are typically difficult to feature in. It's worth looking at the style of writing in these to see what the format is when aimed at a business audience. If you tailor your writing to suit publications like this, you could more easily feature in other more accessible business publications.

Blogging

Consider writing blogs as a cost-effective and efficient strategy to communicate and publicise research to a wide audience. It can bolster your online presence and key topics you've written about can help serve as quick and easy arsenal when approaching potential clients. Blogs are digestible and also more accessible for those outside of academia and offers an online community to discuss and debate a topic. There are a lot [of free and easy to use platforms](#) around.

Building a Narrative

This can be particularly effective and appealing to third and front-line public sector organisations if you can focus on telling a story and make this the centre of your piece rather than beginning with background information or theoretical/critical frameworks . Don't be shy to use compelling and emotional language that engages stakeholders' hearts, as well as minds.

Using Twitter

Building your social media presence with commentary and debate will help raise your profile as well as extend networks and Twitter can be a very effective tool for this. It has become an increasingly popular platform amongst academics as well as students, education professionals, policymakers and politicians.

If you regularly tweet with your own personal account, you may want to consider setting up a separate one that is professionally focussed. Things you might want to tweet about could include:

- details of new publications or resources you've produced
- news items that feature your research
- links to any blog posts or features you've written
- thoughts on conferences you attend
- interesting news items you've found
- comments/observations to people, subjects, groups and organisations you follow that are relevant to your field

LinkedIn

Having a strong and active LinkedIn profile will help to boost your credibility and demonstrate your knowledge and expertise. LinkedIn has over 500 million members making it the *'the largest business-oriented networking website geared specifically towards professionals'*. LinkedIn will be an invaluable marketing tool as you approach commercialising your work and will help to open doors to opportunities and networks.

On LinkedIn you can be 'socially endorsed' by others which is a powerful way to show you are respected by peers and experts.

Joining LinkedIn Groups is a great way to expand your networks and meet professionals in your field. Groups will allow you to connect and take part in discussions and start a dialogue with key people in key organisations and businesses.

Top tips

1. 'Off the shelf' executive summaries with pertinent messages will be preferable for busy senior leaders.
2. A good executive summary acts as a condensed version of a main report. It usually contains a brief statement of the problem or proposal covered in the major research, background information, concise analysis and main conclusions. It should be able to 'stand alone' and less is more when it comes to length – try to keep it to one or two pages.
3. Starting with a thought-provoking statistic and/or quote can help to capture the reader's attention and try to keep a positive tone in your writing. Closing the executive summary with a strong statement that sets up the theme or central message to your research will help entice the reader in.
4. Tag your blog posts with categories. This will improve the chances of your posts being found by search engines and readers.
5. Remember to follow any of the key organisations, charities or businesses you may have identified as wanting to engage with and approach. You can also see the types of people and groups they are following which could provide you with an even wider network of potential stakeholders.

Spotlight

As a spotlight for this toolkit, two researchers have offered some quick thoughts on their experiences using their philosophy and politics expertise in consulting or setting up a new enterprise. In reality, social scientists can work across different policy and practice areas, but the commercialisation of knowledge can be harder to define than in other disciplines such as mathematics or creative arts.

Dr Orly Siow Researcher and Lecturer in the politics of gender, Newcastle University

What were/are the biggest challenges?

✂ **Dr Siow** is currently analysing women's substantive representation in the UK parliament and also consults on the advancement of women's interests through civil society and development programming. A common challenge when consulting is timeframes and how these can often be very tight with invitations to consult frequently being last minute. You also have to be astute to differences between academic and non-academic audiences - recognising that academic and non-academic audiences may have different reasons for processing and using insights. Academic audiences may more readily see how new information helps to build up collective understanding of a topic, whereas non-academic audiences will most likely only want to know how that information powers an action or can persuade a third party to do something they were hesitant about.

What has been the biggest benefit or success? (wherever you currently are in the journey)


✔ For Dr Siow, seeing her research having 'real world' impact is a huge benefit. In her academic work for example, Dr Siow studies gender, race and political representation, and through her consultancy work, she has been able to support women from under-represented groups running for election.

What advice would you give to someone considering commercialising their research?


★ An important point to consider is time. Dr Siow suggests that unless one is considering leaving academia entirely, it is necessary to think about how you can generate synergies between academic work and consultancy practice so that both enrich each-other rather than simply placing greater demands on your time.

Louise Harman University of Sussex, Literature and Philosophy MA 1st Place Social Impact Prize 2021 awarded via the University of Sussex's annual enterprise programme, delivered by the Sussex Innovation Centre


What is your experience of engaging with stakeholders and/or non-academic partners to commercialise your research?

 Louise [registered her business](#) in 2021 borne out of Masters research and a personal experience of loss. This personal connection is something Louise recognises won't necessarily be typical for start-ups with a social-science foundation, but are at the core of her business currently as she explores development and sustainability.


What were/are the biggest challenges?

 Being able to clearly define a product or service that can be monetised. How does a concept, an idea and something that is key to the values and experience of a researcher remain at the forefront when you apply business models and processes / look through the business lens? Louise thinks about herself as an artist and writer, asking questions about death, feeling that the commercial can come later if it is a success. Louise knows she could move into products and branding at a later date, or write a book but is clear that the core resources of the business, that will support people's mental health, be free.

What has been the biggest benefit or success? (wherever you currently are in the journey)

 Finding people that connect with the idea and have an interest in supporting from a creative perspective is a positive. The innovation programme is helping develop and enhance business skills and through being awarded this place, it's clear there is potential for benefit – which may or may not be financial.

What advice would you give to someone considering commercialising their research?

 Being curious through research and ideas exploration has provided an opportunity for Louise to open up a conversation around what is largely considered a taboo subject. For anyone embarking on this journey, a message would be to continue to be creative and curious - commercialising can have wider and bigger societal impact.

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Resources

Aspect (A Social sciences Platform for Entrepreneurship, Commercialisation and Transformation) is a network for organisations looking to make the most of commercial and business opportunities from social sciences research.

More tips on what social media to use: ukri.org/councils/esrc/impact-toolkit-for-economic-and-social-sciences/how-to-use-social-media/choosing-what-social-media-you-use/

The benefits of using LinkedIn

Some ideas on engaging with different client types

This list isn't exhaustive, but it gives a sample of some of the different ways to engage with various private and public sector organisations.

| | Small SME i.e. 30 staff | Mid-size >250 staff | Corporate client | Third sector charitable organisation | Public sector Local government |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|---|--|
| How do I reach them? | Twitter, LinkedIn, talks at networking events, interviews, podcasts | Twitter, LinkedIn, talks at events, interviews, podcasts | LinkedIn, talks at events, interviews, podcasts, industry publications | Events, specialist interest publications | Conferences, networking events, LinkedIn, Twitter, |
| What content should I use? | Social media posts (short), LinkedIn articles (longer), blogs | Social media posts (short), LinkedIn articles (longer), blogs, | LinkedIn articles (longer), blogs, industry articles | Blogs, narrative, case studies, social media (short) | Executive Summaries, LinkedIn articles, case studies |
| How do I appeal to them? | Be clear in your messaging and language. Keep it suitable for a layperson - less is often more | Be clear in your messaging and language. Keep it suitable for a layperson and define the benefits to them very clearly | Be clear with your messaging and language and consider that you may need to stick to their procurement team's guidelines too if you're in a formal procurement process | Be clear in your messaging and language. Keep it suitable for a layperson. They may appreciate the 'human touch' and a demonstration/sym pathy of their core values/mission | Be clear and concise with messaging and language although you may demonstrate understanding of policy briefing documents |

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UoS podcast



In this podcast, Tom Ormerod and Mina Chiang share their experiences of using their academic research within non-academic settings. With a focus on understanding and recognising non-academic expertise and relationship building, both discuss the importance of using research to affect real world change.

The value of networks and being visible to prospective clients

Contents

- [Overview](#)
- [Accessing networks](#)
- [Self promotion](#)
- [Resources](#)

Overview

There are a great many networks that exist across public, charitable and private sectors and will often be made up of a diverse range of businesses, industries and organisations.

Decision makers will be part of networks/partnerships and therefore it is valuable to consider them when thinking about commercial prospects, along with the value and importance of networks in public/third sector for funding opportunities and being linked in. Engaging with public and third sector networks can also offer knowledge of local and/or national funding streams – it can be tricky to know exactly what projects or initiatives are out there where you can potentially engage from a researcher and commercial point of view, but networks can provide an invaluable 'in'. They offer a wealth of benefits to their members at both organisational and individual level such as:

- Access to up-to-date information and opportunities
- New ideas and strategic direction
- Shared knowledge of best practices
- Greater political lobbying strength
- Fostering and maintaining of business connections
- Continuing Professional Development events
- Improved professional and personal visibility and profile

Becoming part of, and tapping into local and national networks may not only help extend potential contacts and client base but may offer different perspectives, knowledge and awareness leading to new opportunities. Networking isn't just about finding clients there on day one - you may be building your network over time to include others to collaborate with or people who are in a similar position to you and you can support each other. Having people who understand what you're doing in business is great for bouncing ideas or challenges around with.

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Build up your contact list to include other experts too so in the future you may be able to refer work to each other as well as collaborate on larger or more complex projects

Top tips to get started with networking

- Networking is helpful to adopt a broader approach beyond your immediate specialised area of expertise.
- Some networks may, for example, have funding opportunities that cut-across different sectors/areas. Some projects may involve more than one industry or sector so you may need to collaborate with others to provide the right solution for a funded project. It's not uncommon for technology to feature as an enabler in a project, yet the funding would come from [X] source rather than a technology funder.
- Join your local Chamber of Commerce and try out different business networking events too.

Accessing networks

Different networks will operate differently - some may have a stricter member base with fees or a subscription attached, whilst others will be more open. Signing up to their newsletter or bulletins is a really helpful starting point - you'll be able to see the types of topics, events and agendas they cover. Remember to keep an eye open for events as they can provide an accessible way in to find out more about the network and meet decision makers

Potential networks for consideration:

[Public Sector Connect](#) are committed to addressing many of the challenges faced by the public sector and work in partnership across a range of organisations, government departments, think tanks and associations to target those responsible for implementing policy and challenges. They hold a number of events and seminars which can offer networking opportunities to meet senior leaders, policy makers, practitioners and industry specialists.

[New Local](#) is an independent think tank and network with a mission to transform public services and unlock community power. They are home to a network of 60+ councils and other organisations, united in a drive to create sustainable, inclusive and community-powered public services.

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[The Sussex Learning Network \(SLN\)](#) is a local partnership of Universities, Further Education Colleges, Local Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships and Independent Training Providers who work collaboratively to help learners access, participate in and progress through to higher level learning. They secure funding to deliver a range of regional projects as well as regularly commission research to support strategy and delivery.

[British Chambers of Commerce](#) Help to connect business locally, nationally and internationally, with other businesses, with decision-makers and with opportunities.

[The Funding Network \(TFN\)](#) Consider attending events hosted by TFN who link potential donors to charitable cases and social entrepreneurs through live crowdfunding.

Self-promotion

Self-promotion may feel uncomfortable, but it's an important part of broadening your exposure and professional profile. An overview of where and how you may do this is:

- Networks – not just academic networks but private sector events in your area of research; Chambers of Commerce; industry-specific and technology networks such as [Wired Sussex](#); and health and education groups (e.g. [SLN](#), [Sussex Council of Training Providers \(SCTP\)](#), teaching school alliances).
- Identifying and preparing to appear on podcasts, interviews, panel discussions, talks at events.
- Understanding how to collaborate with others by broadening your contacts and learning about others' expertise.
- Identifying possible project opportunities, following up and making the most of new contacts.
- Offering presentations or talks at events or on podcasts/ interviews or panels to promote yourself.

Section three

Top tips

- Remember to maintain your relationships - a simple 'check in' from time to time will keep you on their radar.
- Never underestimate the power of 'word of mouth' and recommendations. Either can lead to a foot in the door with potential new contacts and work!
- Tailor your presentations or talks for the audience - often academic research is well understood by academics but not by others. If in doubt, share your content with someone who doesn't understand the content and see if your approach and your key messages are clear.

Resources

[UoS podcast](#)



In this podcast, Kate Thorpe – Deputy Head of Business Engagement, Innovation and Business Partnerships team at the University of Sussex – discusses networking; what it is, why it's beneficial and how you can get started.

How to offer consultancy and training

Contents

- [Overview](#)
- [Consultancy](#)
- [Training](#)
- [Other commercialisation ideas](#)
- [Resources](#)

Overview

This section focuses on consultancy and training as main areas you may wish to consider when thinking about sharing and using your expertise. Try to identify social change/impact challenges and address them directly to provide solutions with a real commercial need. If you become the first to set up a business or offer consultancy in a specific field, you'll become known as a leading authority in that field.

There are personal and professional benefits to becoming a consultant such as:

- Raising your profile and body of work
- A boost on your 'commercial' CV
- Benefitting research and impact activity
- Generating income
- Broadening potential client base
- Societal/economic impacts through changes to policy or practice

Typically, contracting organisations will look for the following skills:

- Strong level of expertise in your field
- Problem solving
- Ideas-led work
- Analytical skills
- Presentation and communication skills
- New approaches informed by latest thinking

In the public/third sector, commissioners often look for:

- Sympathy for or a demonstrated understanding of the ethos/priorities/objectives of the organisation.
- Ability to collaborate.
- There is an increasing demand from both public and third sector organisations to demonstrate 'evidence of impact' to satisfy stakeholders and secure further funding.

Section four

In the private sector, decision makers often look for:

- An understanding of their business drivers and strategic aims.
- How your solution adds value to them and supports their business needs or growth.
- A return on investment.

You may also wish to consider co-production and/or co-design with peers either within, or external to, academia to strengthen and broaden your offer.

Consultancy

Research consultants are hired or contracted by organisations in both the private and public/third sectors to carry out specific, targeted research and to analyse and present key findings.

Public and third sector organisations may also commission consultants to support funding applications - this could, for example include desk research, data collection and analysis and consolidation of impact reports.

Publicly funded projects often have a remit from their funders to carry out monitoring and evaluation to assess the performance of and impact projects. Some organisations don't always have the resource or expertise to carry this out internally and will therefore seek external consultants to help either advise on, design, or fully carry out their monitoring and evaluation. This could include for example:

- Providing strategic advice
- Developing and designing evaluation frameworks
- Data collection and analysis
- Providing practical methods and toolkits that will assist with their monitoring and evaluation
- Collaboratively working with certain team members to help carry out and complete monitoring and evaluation
- Consolidating research and findings

Some organisations may advertise for a freelance or contracted position for specific time-bound projects. Consultancy work can also help the organisation be better positioned as 'thought leaders' in their field.

Section four

Training

Opportunities to offer training around some core methodological processes which may help the organisation with light-touch internal research as well as monitoring and evaluation elements could also offer a commercial arm. This could, for example, include training around:

- Your specific areas of knowledge, research or expertise relevant to your client as a course or workshop.
- Scaling up and offering train-the-training skills to create more capacity for you and to maintain consistency in what you offer by sharing your skills well.
- Focus groups - managing, collating outputs.
- Carrying out interviews, conducting surveys, evaluation and monitoring.
- Developing and creating research or data driven case studies.

Other commercialisation ideas

Spinout company - This is a company developed through the University's research. The spinout will involve academic representation (current or former researchers and sometimes PhD students) who make up the board. Either the University or one its affiliated venture funds provides initial capital for the business and will typically act as a large shareholder from the outset. The company as a legal entity has access to the institution's workspace facilities. Any profits after tax can be retained with dividends paid to shareholders.

One example of a spinout company is Bath Social & Development Research ([Bath SDR](#)). They are a non-profit research organisation founded by a small team of researchers from the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) at the University of Bath with the ambition to bring more research into practice. Their aims are to be a development hub for cutting edge applied research; use new research methods to contribute to positive change in the social and development sectors; and provide further research opportunities for CDS alumni and staff as well as wider capacity building across the world.

An [Aspect funded project](#) looked at the commercialisation of educational games produced within the world of social sciences. The initiative was led by Manchester University, with Nottingham Trent, Bristol, and Glasgow as partners. The aim was to increase understanding and experience in finding pathways to marketing games, ultimately enabling universities to tap into what is, at present, an under-used reservoir of potential.

Section four

Licensing – a common approach and a relatively simple route to take knowledge from research to market quickly. In addition to utilising the knowledge, a licence may also include an agreement to use a university’s insignia, logos or trademarks as an endorsement of the quality and authenticity of the product or service. The university should have oversight of the licensee to ensure high standards are maintained. If setting up a private company, do not include the intellectual property in the company’s assets. Instead, you should keep it with the university and grant a licence to your company. Otherwise, if the company fails, the intellectual property will have to be bought back from the liquidators before it can be developed further.

[Social enterprise](#) – often has the structure of a conventional firm or spinout, but operates as a business. Any excess income may be retained by the organisation for future business development, to fund research, or to alleviate societal needs. The impact and purpose of the organisation are valued equally with the goal of making a profit. Social scientists may choose to set up a social enterprise for themselves, or to work in partnership with an existing one that would benefit from their research input.

Resources

[The Bright Network](#) - Helps to link graduates to employers - they have section on becoming a consultant.

[UKRI \(UK Research and Innovation\) toolkit on commercialisation](#)



Visit the Sussex ESRC IAA [YouTube channel](#) to view video examples of research in action.

Developing your unique selling point (USP), your brand and protecting your IP

Contents

- [Overview](#)
- [Understanding what to offer](#)
- [Pitching for work](#)
- [Resources](#)

Overview

Although we have left this until the end of the toolkit, in many ways this is the most important section.

There are many factors that will be key in the decision making processes of your prospective clients and collaborators. The 'Moments of Truth' pages at the start of this toolkit break that down into more detail – but underpinning that will be the story of who you are, what you can offer and why it is different or unique.

Being able to articulate why you do what you do, and what problems you are helping to solve, is core to your personal brand. Add on top of that clear demonstrations of knowledge, reliability, efficiency and value-for-money and people will advocate for you in the best possible way. Branding is not just for big corporates or fashionable labels – brand covers everything that relates to you as a professional for hire, and how people perceive your offer.

Your university can be a real asset and a powerful strategic tool in your brand arsenal, so ensure you work closely with colleagues and department academics on collaborative pitches and proposals – complementing services with your skills and not competing. This will help open doors for your own eventual consultancy, training or research contracts with individual clients.

Building a personal brand takes time, and consistency. Looking after your intellectual property (IP) is key to that, as this is your greatest asset as a social science researcher. Your IP includes your ideas, approach and way of doing things, as well as any business names, logos, visuals, website copy and typography you may come to use as an identifier of your work. There is a link to a great podcast in this section that goes into more detail about academic IP and how to protect it.

Understanding what to offer

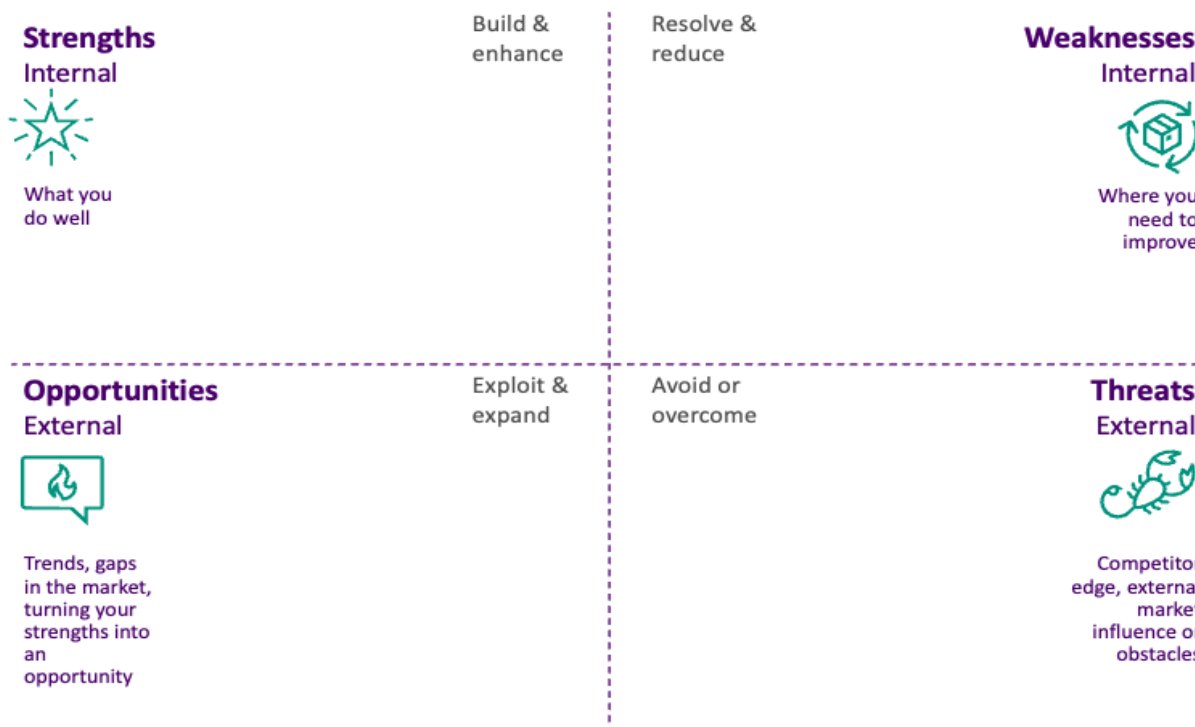
SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis is a great way to see how your skills and research expertise are differentiated in the private sector. Knowing what your strengths and weaknesses are in what you do, then finding the opportunities and defining the threats, will put you in a good place to present your offer more objectively.

Exercise:

In this exercise, you could focus on what your SWOT might be. Spend some time listing down what you do well and where you need to improve. These are 'internal' factors i.e. about you and how you work and would cover your perceived strengths and weaknesses. Your strength might be your depth of specific research and how you are able to articulate this for a wide audience. However your weakness may be a lack of network or potential avenues for promoting this.

Then look at what your opportunities and threats are externally. These identify potential trends or gaps in the market which your research or expertise could be used for, however there may also be threats to this. A threat could be that there is generally limited funding available for your research work, or perhaps there are many other competitors in your field.



Defining your value proposition

You may hear of value propositions or USPs and find this somewhat daunting. Your USP is your unique selling point and it's important to factor in what makes you unique when you're looking to stand out from other researchers or consultants.

A good place to start is to define what you do but more importantly, what issues or challenges your research or expertise addresses. Anyone buying services will ask themselves "what's in it for me" so you need to be able to address this succinctly and positively.

This toolkit has mentioned making your key messages appropriate for different sectors or client types, and you can tailor the messaging which comes from your value proposition too.






Exercise:

You can complete this exercise to run through what you think your value proposition is by following the steps below.

1. Firstly, identify the problem or challenge for your potential client. This should be as specific as possible and generally not on a macro level. For instance, climate change is a macro issue but your client's related problem could be focused on how they promote and sell their low carbon technical innovation.
2. The impact here is focused on what happens if they don't solve their problem or address the challenge. Perhaps for this client, they're pitching to clients who operate in a regulated industry and they don't have a breadth of knowledge around wider environmental or geographical impacts.
3. Your solution may be a piece of research and consultancy focused on the environmental or socio-economic benefits that this client's technical innovation provides.
4. Do you have any proof of the work you've done elsewhere? If you do, then including case studies or testimonials is a great idea to cement the thought in the client's mind that you're credible and have the right expertise for this project.

Section five

5. Lastly, 'so what'. This is the part which can take the most work. What makes you different to other researchers? Is it your deep understanding of this field of research or your network in the area which this client is interested in working in? In this example, it could be as obvious as you having written an academic paper on the impacts of this type of innovation already and you may be able to get up and running with this client faster than other researchers.

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Problem</p>  | <p>What is the customer or client's needs, challenges or problem?</p> |
| <p>Impact</p>  | <p>What is the impact on them of not solving the problem/ addressing the challenge?</p> |
| <p>Solution</p>  | <p>What is our solution and how will we do this?</p> |
| <p>Proof</p>  | <p>Where have we done this well before? Case studies, testimonials, quotes <i>etc</i></p> |
| <p>So what?</p>  | <p>What is the benefit to the customer or client?</p> |

Pitching for work

Key considerations for different commercial propositions – what do different businesses need and how to tailor your offer

An important part of winning work with new clients is pitching to them. This may take the form of an interview, taking them through a presentation or pitching a few ideas to them in order to choose a solution.

Pitching can feel daunting but if you are confident in your value proposition, have researched the organisation well and have prepared your content you should be on a good footing to present to them.

Section five

Top tips for pitching and presenting

- Understand your audience and tailor your content to suit. A text heavy or dense presentation is too hard to digest for most people, so keep the slides simple and include any accompanying reports separately.
- Take some time to rehearse your content and to relax ahead of time. Slow down your speech, take deep breaths and don't rush. This will help to keep any nervousness under control.
- Consider having a few questions and answers rehearsed so you're happy to have a dialogue during the presentation. A good pitch is a two-way conversation rather than a one-way speech.
- If in doubt, approach a pitch with 'less is more' in terms of content. If you have a straightforward approach then you can follow up with the detail when you have 'questions and answers'.
- It's OK not to discuss costs and fees during a pitch. You may present your fees but you can follow up with any negotiations afterwards - you don't need to feel under pressure to negotiate on the spot

Resources

[UoS podcast](#)



In this podcast, Keith O'Brien and Luke Mitchell from the University of Sussex discuss protecting intellectual property (IP), and the importance of considering business thinking earlier in academia. As an IP business partner to the university Keith explains what can be covered and how and Luke, as the university's Business Adviser walks us through the value proposition canvas.

Section five

Sustainability of funding and staff: Revenue from social science research has the potential to increase sustainability by funding further research. For example, commercialisation income might be used to support post-doctoral researchers and research assistants. Where grant funds are limited, commercialising research can create alternative funding streams which can benefit the entire social science community.

Personal recognition: At an individual level, commercialisation of research is usually not motivated by personal gain, but by the academic's desire for a widespread, sustainable, positive impact on society. However, commercialisation can be a way to positively distinguish yourself and your work from your peers. Indeed, there are some institutions that recognise and reward research commercialisation, and build this into performance evaluation and their academic promotion pathway.

Research Excellence Framework (REF) evaluation: Commercialisation of social science research can be a major plus point in the evaluation of a university's research impact. The research impacts commercialisation can build, enabling these to grow and be sustained, can achieve significant and far reaching societal economic benefit, and so make excellent REF impact case studies.

Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF): The KEF framework is in place to recognise excellence in knowledge exchange. This will help support research organisations to continue to encourage academics of all disciplines to exploit the outputs of their research through approaches like spin-outs and licensing among many other mechanisms.

Research in Practice - Works with organisations to enable them to access, understand and apply evidence in their work with children and families, young people and adults. Brings together academic research, practice expertise and the experiences of people accessing services to then apply this knowledge to develop a range of resources and learning opportunities, as well as delivering tailored services, expertise and training.

The Sutton Trust Champions Social Mobility through programmes, research and policy influence. They work in partnership with leading UK and US universities, foundations, corporate partners and other not-for-profits.

Policy Connect is a cross-party think tank with four main policy pillars which are: Education & Skills; Industry, Technology & Innovation; Sustainability; and Health & Accessibility.

Section five

They specialise in supporting parliamentary groups, forums and commissions for which Policy Connect provides the secretariat and delivers impactful policy research and event programmes. They are a social enterprise and are funded by a combination of regular annual membership subscriptions and time-limited sponsorships.

[The Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) is an independent social change organisation working to solve UK poverty. Cross-cutting work, projects and research.

[CLES](#) is the national organisation for local economies - developing progressive economics for people, planet and place and strive to achieve social justice and effective public services.

[Resolution Foundation](#) is an independent think tank focused on improving living standards for those on low to middle incomes. They work across a wide range of economic and social policy, combining our core purpose with a commitment to analytical rigour.

[Institute for Voluntary Action Research](#) - independent charity that works closely with people and organisations striving for social change. From the very small that directly support the most vulnerable in their local communities, to those that work nationally – across the voluntary, public and funding sectors. They use research to develop practical responses to the challenges faced and create opportunities for people to learn from their findings.

[The British Academy](#) - UK's national academy for the humanities and social sciences and funding body that supports new research, nationally and internationally.

[Local Government Association](#): national voice of local government, working with councils to support, promote and improve local government.

[The Northern Bridge Public Policy Engagement Toolkit](#) provides a useful list of influential think tanks from across the UK.

CRM – customer relationship management is both a software system and an activity. Once you build your networks and contacts, you should try to keep them organised online in either a spreadsheet or you might choose to use a low-cost CRM system. By keep your contacts in an online system, you can add notes about that person or project and also set reminders to follow up with them taking out some of the manual work in remembering what was last said.

C-suite – are executive level managers in an organisation. C-suite is a general term used in the private sector to find the levels of a hierarchy and therefore decision making quite quickly. These will often be the decision makers and responsible for projects within their area, e.g. the CTO is a Chief Technology Officer so will have a keen interest in IT and technology solutions. The CFO as the Chief Finance Officer is more likely to be involved in signing off project budgets.

Employers liability insurance - can help you pay compensation if an employee is injured or becomes ill as a result of the work they do for you.

Procurement – is the act of purchasing goods or services for an organisation. Where you will see this when working with public or large private sector clients, is in the form of a procurement team. They are responsible for vetting suppliers and managing the process of contract management, compliance and cost saving. They ensure value for money for an organisation by keeping processes centralised and transparent. You may liaise with them if you enter into a formal tender process.

Professional indemnity insurance - covers the cost of compensating clients for loss or damage resulting from negligent services or advice that is provided by an individual or a business. Whether you are a self-employed individual or working for a company providing your knowledge, skills or advice as part of your profession, you should consider taking out professional indemnity insurance.

Public liability insurance - this is one of the main types of business insurance available and can cover compensation payments and legal costs if your business is sued because a member of the public (maybe a customer, a supplier, or a visitor) has been injured or their property has been damaged.

Glossary of key terms

ROI – return on investment is a quantifiable measure used in relation to investing in project costs. Defining what the return or benefit to a client will be after they've invested in i.e. bought a specific product or service will be the ROI. It's a term often used in marketing to decide on where organisations decide to spend a marketing budget.

SMEs and SMEs – one is a Subject Matter Expert and one is a Small or Medium sized Enterprise. Make sure you get the context right and explain in full which SME you're referring to in your work as in the private sector, an SME generally is related to business size rather than an academic subject matter expert.

USP – unique selling point is a term you might hear in marketing or sales. It refers to a feature or characteristic of what you do that distinguishes it from others of a similar nature and makes it more appealing. If you want to be unique in what you offer to clients, you should list out what your clients really want and decide what you do well. The overlap of both areas is where you can distinguish yourself.

Value proposition – this is a summary of why a client would choose to work with you and it should clearly state the benefits to them. Every value proposition should speak to a client's challenge and focus on how they define your value and it shows you as the problem-solver. Once it's clearly understood, you can use this in your marketing communications too.

WIIFM – what's in it for me. This is an acronym or phrase you might hear related to the sales process. If you look at your value proposition and think of what a client would say about it, then put yourself in their shoes and ask yourself 'what's in it for me' and this will help to demonstrate what the benefits you should offer more clearly.