



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Translation, Negotiation, Advocacy: the REACT challenge” Working paper, January 2013

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About the report

This paper has been written at the end of REACT Hub’s first year of operation (February 1st 2012 – January 31st 2013). It reflects on the work of the REACT collaboration to date and identifies the conceptual, theoretical and practical challenges that have emerged.

What is REACT?

REACT is one of four Knowledge Exchange Hubs established and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). REACT was established in 2012. It is led by the University of the West of England and Bristol digital creativity centre Watershed, in collaboration with the Universities of Bath, Bristol, Cardiff and Exeter.

REACT’s overarching aim is to develop new models for knowledge exchange (KE) that position Arts and Humanities research within innovative practice in the creative economy. REACT achieves this by funding collaborative R&D projects that bring together creative companies and academics working in the arts and humanities.

What are the findings of this report?

This report outlines five key challenges facing REACT. They relate both to specific operational challenges and broader concerns about how to support growth in the creative economy, value research and advocate for the role of creative and cultural activity in society. These challenges can be summarised as follows:

1. Geographical reach

The creative economy varies in scale, intensity and political/cultural approach across the REACT region. It takes time and resources to form a distributed network across this large geographic reach. Meeting and networking with creative and academic communities across Wales and the SW is labour intensive.

2. Institutional cultures in the REACT collaboration

Slow working timescales and attitudes to risk at Higher Education Institutions, relative to those of the creative economy are a key challenge because they create bad faith in the creative business partners. REACT now ensures long lead up times for Sandbox applications and meets regularly with Finance, legal and contracting representatives from HEIs to ensure all parties are kept abreast of changes/challenges.

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3. Different ways of working

Traditional arts and humanities academic researchers are often wary of research using digital technology and demanding impact. Academic researchers and publicly funded cultural organisations are also often deeply acculturated to the idea of one off project funding which challenges longevity of REACT projects. To overcome this and encourage the idea of a REACT project as the start of a sustainable venture, REACT emphasises exploitability and innovation as key. The production of accessible evidence to encourage engagement is also part of our strategy.

4. The experience of creative work

If REACT are to support collaborations to produce innovation in both academia and business, leave a lasting legacy in the these sectors, and find ways to unlock the value of academic research, we need to understand how creative work is experienced in this form of KE.

5. Value

Methodologies for understanding and evaluating value creation in the Creative Economy are underdeveloped. A linear model of the value chain is clearly not useful: however we have as yet thinly developed methods for evaluating the impact of creative networks like REACT.

As a result of negotiating these challenges, the REACT collaboration has identified the need for **translation**, **negotiation** and **advocacy** in the everyday work of REACT:

- We **translate** between working cultures and spaces, such as between creative businesses and HEIs, artists and academics, and the scales of small businesses to large.
- We **negotiate** between different organisational languages and ways of working; we work with institutions and organisations whose systems and understandings of ways of working maybe very different. We broker conversations and look for new ways to work together.
- We **advocate** for new ways of doing things. We believe in the value of collaborative, creative, Knowledge Exchange, but believe that the methods needed to do it successfully need to be advocated for.

Concluding remarks:

1. REACT is operating in an exciting theoretical and operational terrain. Traditional models of knowledge exchange hinged on the exploitation of intellectual property developed through academic research are changing. Whereas in disciplines like engineering, medicine and the sciences, outputs – inventions or discoveries – are more apparent and easier to exploit, REACT is looking to unlock different types of creative value. Recognising and resolving the challenge above will be an important operational task to help REACT realise these aims.
2. The REACT collaboration has already connected with 153 creative businesses across the region at Heritage Ideas Labs events, a space to meet potential collaborators and formulate bids to REACT. Of these, 40 creative businesses came from Devon/Cornwall and 30 from Wales. Of all the collaborations formed at Ideas Labs, 60 submitted bids to REACT. Of these, 26 Creative companies have been funded as core partners across Heritage and Books & Print Sandboxes, Strategic Funds and HEIF projects. The REACT collaboration has also made early operational progress in developing new systems and promoting culture change across the partner institutions.
3. The REACT collaboration has developed an approach to innovation led by core partner Watershed. The flexible, fast and open ethos of working developed by iShed and at the Pervasive Media Studio is central to the delivery of REACT.
4. Creative producers within the REACT delivery team supply a distinctive set of talents needed in the field of creative innovation. They operate in multiple ways, acting as boundary spanners between sectors, project managers and advisors to support funded projects, relationship brokers within the REACT network and

creative practitioners in their own right. These roles address many of the needs for 'brokers' in KE projects identified by a number of KE reports (CIHE, 2010, CIHE, 2012b) and provide a new set of skills specific to the creative and arts sector.

5. The REACT collaboration recognises the need to be reflexive space in which learning through thinking, doing and research enables the project to adapt and evolve. REACT continues to research, document and assess its own work, and is developing mechanisms to share this learning with other KE Hubs.