



Academic Collaboration Evaluation and Research Group Terms of Reference

1. Role and Purpose

The Academic Collaboration Evaluation and Research Group (ACER or the Group) is an independent forum, convened by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), to help coordinate and maximise the benefits of academic research with relevance for fire and rescue services (FRS or services) to contribute to improved public and firefighter safety.

Its aim is to act as a conduit between services across the UK and academia, opening channels of communication, and improving and coordinating the flow of information between the two. It will facilitate discussion and seek to influence areas of research interest that have either not been open to services in the past or optimised for their benefit. It will provide an avenue to explore and maximise research funding opportunities.

The role of ACER is to oversee, monitor and review research findings pertinent to the sector, as well as to receive and consider requests for research from the NFCC aligned to its strategic direction and priorities. It will enable the approach to research; designed to benefit services, the profession, and the communities served by them; to be better coordinated, informed and commissioned. It will do this through:

- Interpreting research findings that may inform or drive change and continuous improvement within services and share relevant information with them;
- Contributing to the NFCC strategic approach to research with the purpose of working collaboratively to iterate, shape direction and delivery of strategic research priorities;
- Coordinating and prioritising research requests including access routes to carry out research and potential funding sources;
- Maximising the opportunity for those in the sector, seeking to complete research as part of their continued professional development, to support research requirements identified through ACER.

1.1 Responsibilities

The Group is responsible for agreeing priorities and developing a workplan. This may include:

- Supporting a knowledge exchange between academic disciplines and services;
- Evaluating research to identify its relevance to services in achieving improvements and make recommendations for action based on those findings;
- Identifying ways that research can drive innovation supported by the NFCC;
- Supporting academic institutions and services to collaborate resulting in research undertaken that addresses shared needs and national priorities;
- Identifying and communicate potential funding opportunities for research; providing support and guidance to assist relevant stakeholders to access that funding; and
- Providing advice to the NFCC and services on matters relevant to the Group where required.

The Group will prioritise academic analysis and research using the agreed Academic Disciplines and that would influence the broad areas of priority for services and the profession below:

- Public safety
- Firefighter safety
- Organisational reputation
- Government priorities
- Inspectorate themes and trends.

It is also responsible for raising awareness of research findings and research requirements to services and other relevant stakeholders. That may be research which is in progress; produced; or being considered.

The Group will consider the work of research produced by other relevant bodies and organisations and will evaluate, reference or promote research from them wherever appropriate.

The Group may monitor the effectiveness of work produced for the profession to support continuous improvement, including considering feedback from HMICFRS and services on how its outcomes have been implemented.

The Group will engage with key stakeholders, as and when appropriate, nationally and internationally.

2. Membership

The Group has the following members:

- Independent Chair
- Vice Chair (NFCC representative)
- NFCC National Operational Learning representative
- Other appropriate NFCC Lead Officers as agreed with the Chair and Vice Chair
- Representatives of academic disciplines identified by the Chair and Vice chair
- Key stakeholder representatives as identified by the Chair and Vice Chair

The NFCC Chair is responsible for appointing the Chair and Vice Chair of the Group. The Chair is independent of the NFCC, the Government and services. They are selected using a fair and open appointment process coordinated by the NFCC.

The Vice Chair will be the NFCC lead for Organisational Learning representing the interests of services and the profession on the Group. They will be responsible for ensuring the work of the Group is aligned to NFCC strategy and priorities.

The Chair is appointed for a 24-month period, after which point the roles will be reviewed by the NFCC Chair. The NFCC Chair may review the appointment of the Chair and Vice Chair at any point if the Chair does not meet the outlined responsibilities.

The Chair and Vice Chair will:

- Lead the Group and be responsible for how the Group operates;
- Be responsible for determining the size and make-up of the Group, reviewing Group membership and adjusting membership if required based on the needs and workplan of the Group;
- Be responsible for identifying relevant academic disciplines to help in categorising and aligning work; and
- Be responsible for identifying and agreeing suitable individuals to represent academic disciplines.

Other members of the Group will represent the various academic disciplines which are relevant to the sector. Other key stakeholder organisations may be proportionately represented on the Group in agreement with the Chair and Vice Chair.

The role of other members is to represent the interests of their academic discipline or organisation in discussions and take decisions collectively as part of the Group in the interests of the public and the services as a whole. In the interests of continuity, representatives attending should be the same at all meetings.

If a Group member is unable to attend a meeting, in certain circumstances and in agreement in advance with the Chair, they may nominate an appropriate alternate representative to attend on their behalf. If this is agreed, then the nominated representative must have the same authority to take decisions at the meetings as the person they are deputising for.

Group members may request additional members of their organisation to attend meetings as observers or in support, this must be agreed in advance with the Chair.

Additional attendees may be invited to attend a Group meeting as and when required and in line with the agenda. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Specialist subject matter experts or guests in relation to specific pieces of work or agenda items;
- Inspectorates;
- Health and safety executives;
- College of Policing representatives; and/or
- Other stakeholders that do not have a standing position on the Group.

The attendance of additional attendees will be agreed in advance with the Chair and Group members will be informed in advance.

3. How the Group operates

The Group is supported by the NFCC who will provide resources to act as a secretariat to the Group and help coordinate the workplan of the Group.

Meetings may take place in-person or online and members will be advised of arrangements in advance.

Meeting agendas are prepared in agreement with the Chair. Group members may raise any items for the agenda. Meeting papers are distributed one week in advance of each meeting. The Chair approves the agenda and chairs Group meetings. If the Chair is absent, their role is taken by the Vice Chair.

Group members are free to express their own views within the context of a Group meeting discussion.

Group members are given an appropriate amount of time to consider any decisions required of them.

Whilst the Group aims to make decisions by reaching consensus through discussion, it is accepted that decisions may be based on a majority decision to allow work to progress. Once a decision is reached all Group members must abide by it.

The secretariat is responsible for preparing the meeting's minutes after each meeting and agreeing their content with the Chair before distributing them for comment to the Group.

The initial term for the Group is two years.

The Group will conduct an annual review of these terms of reference and revisions will be made, if agreed appropriate.

4. Accountability

Members of the Group have a responsibility in ensuring that the work of the Group delivers improvements to the professionalism of the sector and the highest quality delivery of services to the public, as well as improving access of the sector to relevant academic institutions.

They will also ensure that the work of the Group supports academic institutions in identifying opportunities to influence the fire sector and achieve public benefit from their work.

The Group sets the priorities for development work and areas of investigation.

The Group seeks to ensure that any work presented to them for recommendation has:

- Been developed in line with agreed good practice and rigour;
- Undergone appropriate consultation with subject matter experts and relevant stakeholders; and
- Undergone an independent quality assurance process.

The NFCC and academic institutions may consider the recommendations made by the Group as part of their prioritisation and work setting.

Work recommended by the Group may be carried out by either an academic institution or by the NFCC, at which point the terms of references for those organisations will apply. In these circumstances the Group would seek to have suitable opportunity to share information, clarify expectations or discuss the research process with those carrying out research. The Group also reserves the right to be provided regular updates on progress in return for access to its expertise and guidance.

The Group holds no responsibility for the outcomes of the work commissioned based on its recommendations and as a result of its findings and decisions.

The Group may recommend the NFCC consider publication of work on NFCC platforms. Final decision for publication is for consideration by the relevant NFCC Committee or Group.

4.1 Secretariat function

The NFCC will provide secretariat support to the Chair, Vice -Chair and the Group, which includes:

1. Organisation of meeting dates, venues and inviting Group members to meetings;
2. Preparation of meeting agendas, papers and minutes in liaison with the Chair; and,
3. Coordination and planning of communications and engagement activity, for and on behalf of the Chairs and the Group.

The Secretariat will facilitate and coordinate work, it is responsible for:

1. Preparing proposals for and planning work to be considered by the Group;
2. Facilitating work when commissioned;
3. Sourcing, collating and creating relevant reports for consideration by the Group; and
4. Monitoring impact assessment, benefits realisation and periodic reporting on work relevant to the Group.

The NFCC and its members are responsible for:

1. Nominating a relevant national lead officer to sponsor or support workstreams agreed following approval by the appropriate NFCC committee and provide subject matter expertise and strategic direction;
2. Supporting the work of academic institutions for work identified by the Group by providing access to services, and other relevant organisations and where possible helping to identify funding and other assistance; and
3. Identifying appropriate routes of governance and scrutiny to allow completed work to influence NFCC products and service delivery.

Stakeholders (which can include the NFCC) are responsible for:

4. Providing guidance to the Group of the potential impacts of work, and helping to identify possible avenues of investigation or funding; and
5. Supporting the work by providing access and resources where possible.

National Operational Learning and other NFCC learning functions are responsible for:

6. Collaborating with the Group to share relevant information, following agreed information sharing protocols;
7. Supporting the Group in identifying appropriate information;
8. Providing direction to the Group based on identified areas of interest. For example, incidents that have seen upward trends in the UK, inspectorate recommendations or incident types that have little or no identified learning against them.

5. Group Member Behaviours

Members of the Group are expected to operate in line with the principles set out in the [Cabinet Office's Code of Conduct for Group Members of Public Bodies](#).

The Code sets out the standards expected of those who serve on Groups in the UK public sector.

6. Meetings and Secretariat

The Group meets as frequently as required, but no less than four times per year.

Meetings of the Group may be held in person or via remote communication. The arrangements and venue for meetings are made known to Group members in advance of each meeting.

Members of the Group are occasionally asked to take decisions outside of the scheduled meetings. Should the Group not be able to reach a decision outside of a Group meeting, the decision will be deferred to the next scheduled meeting. Alternatively, the Chair may schedule an exceptional meeting of the Group to resolve the matter.

The Chair and Vice Chair may meet with members of the Secretariat, as and when needed, to discuss outcomes from previous Group meetings, matters arising in between meetings and preparations needed in advance of future Group meetings.

7. ACER Stakeholders

Outside of the core membership of the Group, it is recognised there are many stakeholders that may have an interest in the work of the Group. Some may also wish to engage or inform its work on a regular basis.

To avoid the scope of meetings and the work of the Group to be inadvertently expanded, it is proposed that the Group will identify key stakeholders and jointly agree the best methods to engage and include them in the work of the Group.

Once the Group has become established, how the Group liaises and engages with stakeholders will be reviewed to ensure the Group is benefitting from the information and perspectives that wider stakeholders may bring.

The Group will, where possible, utilise existing forums or engagement opportunities where the work of the Group may be shared and discussed.

The Secretariat will maintain a stakeholder register and coordinate engagement activity that may be undertaken by the Chair or Vice Chair.