



Government Office for
Technology Transfer

Knowledge Asset Commercialisation – Consulting case studies

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Introduction

This document presents case studies demonstrating consulting activities undertaken by public sector bodies. It highlights core benefits and key areas to think about when developing consulting offerings.

Consulting is providing information or advisory services to a third party via a contractual agreement, most commonly to the private sector. It is one way of commercialising knowledge assets, to deliver value to citizens and the economy. For further information on commercialisation of knowledge assets please see the [Knowledge Asset Commercialisation Guide](#). For further information on managing knowledge assets please see [The Rose Book](#).

The UK's public sector bodies contain world-leading expertise and know-how, and offering consulting is a common route to create value and impact from these.

Consulting activities offer several strategic and practical advantages for public sector bodies.

Core benefits of consulting activity

Supporting growth

Our public sector bodies have world-leading expertise. Through consulting, private companies in the UK get access to this world-leading expertise. This benefits their business activities and promotes growth in the wider UK economy.

Support delivery of organisational objectives

Consulting allows organisations to apply their expertise in ways that directly support their strategic mission. By leveraging both the public and private sector's resources and capabilities, consulting can increase the scale of impact of research and innovation from within the public sector.

Establishing trusted relationships with external partners

Consulting presents an opportunity to work with a range of external partners in the private and public sector, both within the UK and overseas. Working effectively with other organisations helps maintain and build relationships for the longer term.

Applied learnings to future commercialisation of know-how

When entering a consulting contract, the public sector body may be converting know-how into a potential product, for example, training materials. This may assist the future development, refinement and commercialisation of knowledge assets.

Accelerating professional development

Employees engaged in consulting can gain valuable exposure to other organisations, enhancing their skills, reputation and experience. It gives individuals the chance to develop, while retaining their position at public sector bodies. It benefits their home organisation by providing access to new ideas and ways of working, strengthening external partnerships, giving staff the chance to test research in new environments, and growing organisational capability.

Generating income

Consulting provides a relatively fast and low-investment route for generating income. It can deliver financial returns quickly. Often successful consulting work can lead to follow-on collaboration and further commercialisation opportunities.

Leverage world-leading expertise

Working alongside other organisations through consulting often involves public sector bodies' advice being sought due to their reputation as a trusted source of expertise and authority. By offering consulting associated with the organisation's reputation, public sector bodies can ensure effective delivery of trusted advice while also boosting engagement among their community of stakeholders.

Things to consider

As mentioned above, consulting has many benefits to public sector bodies. For public sector bodies to maximise the opportunity, here are some topics to consider when entering into consulting contracts:

- Public sector bodies should ensure any consulting activity fits within their strategic objectives. For further information, please see the Government Office for Technology Transfer's [Knowledge Asset Management Strategies: guidance for public sector organisations](#).
- As part of an organisation's Knowledge Asset Management Strategy it is recommended that there is an **Incentives Policy for commercialisation**. This is an effective way to encourage activities like consulting. Please see the Government Office for Technology Transfer's [Incentivising Employees to Engage in Knowledge Asset Management](#).
- It's likely that employees have the know-how needed to deliver the consulting contract. **Staff capacity** should be managed to ensure it doesn't impact 'business as usual' activities.
- **Risk management** and **reputational considerations** will affect whether a public sector body decides to enter into a consulting agreement. Please see HM Treasury's [The Orange Book Management of Risk – Principles and Concepts](#) for guidance on risk management principles.

- Ensuring relevant **governance** structures are in place allows for clear accountability. For more information, please see the Cabinet Office's [Guide to governance and management frameworks](#).
- An organisation should ensure it has a defined way of managing **conflicts of interest**. Please see the Cabinet Office's [Guidance: Conflicts of Interest](#) on how to manage this.



**British
Antarctic Survey**

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL

How UK public sector science informed 'Frozen Planet II'

The British Antarctic Survey (BAS) acted as a **scientific consulting partner** to the BBC Natural History Unit, providing expert advice to ensure the science behind one of the BBC's flagship documentary series was accurate and clearly communicated to a global audience.

Background

'Frozen Planet II' was developed to bring the science of the polar regions to one of the largest television audiences in the world. The BBC needed scientific input that was **authoritative, trusted and accessible**.

BAS was approached for its **world-leading expertise in Antarctic research**, its long-term climate datasets and its experience translating complex science for public audiences. The consulting was led by Professor Michael Meredith, Science Leader of the Polar Oceans Team at BAS, working in conjunction with BAS's Innovation Directorate, to support the development and delivery of the consulting. Together, they worked closely with producers from early development through to final production, helping shape how climate processes, sea ice loss and ocean dynamics were explained on screen.

Considerations

From the outset, BAS put **clear governance in place**, agreeing scope and responsibilities and ensuring the work aligned with BAS's public mission and international commitments. Alongside this, BAS scientists approached the consulting opportunity with an open mind: ready to learn from creative and technical experts, to adapt to different ways of working and to collaborate constructively. Creating the space for curiosity and enjoyment was an important part of making the partnership effective.

Benefits

The partnership **strengthened BAS's reputation** as a trusted, independent source of scientific advice and created a route for BAS to engage with ongoing consulting opportunities. It also supported professional development for researchers and helped audiences better understand how polar research connects to everyday life, demonstrating the wider value and impact of public-sector consulting.

Quick tips

- BAS had to decide whether engaging with this work would benefit them. Through the work with the BBC, they were able to ensure the information being spread to viewers was accurate, while spreading awareness of BAS's overall message on a wider scale than they would usually be able to reach.
- Each public sector body should consider who they are partnering with and whether that organisation is credible.
- Engaging effectively with the BBC on this piece of work has enabled BAS to engage in other consulting work of a similar nature. Public sector bodies should consider long-term benefits to the organisation from engaging in consulting activities.



Frozen Planet II /
BBC Studios/Getty/
Shutterstock



Establishing a joint venture to enable applied impact through consulting

Kew Reach was set up in 2024 to support large-scale nature-based solutions for ecological restoration, using the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew's scientific and horticultural expertise. It is a joint venture between RBG Kew and Greensphere Capital.

Kew Reach supports landscape-scale restoration, climate-resilient planting and green infrastructure. Work is underpinned by botanical, ecological and data-driven evidence, helping partners make well-informed decisions on policy, investment and delivery. Services typically include technical and scientific advice.

Partners and external engagement

Kew Reach provides a structured interface between Kew and external partners. These partners engage Kew Reach to access trusted, **independent expertise** to support time-bound decisions such as policy development, infrastructure planning or investment in large-scale nature-based solutions. The consulting model supports agile delivery by Kew Reach, complemented by Kew's scientific expertise and quality assurance to ensure technical robustness and credibility.

Considerations

As a public sector research organisation, Kew must ensure consulting activity is undertaken with appropriate **governance** and **risk management**. Key considerations include:

- alignment with charitable objectives
- clear separation from research activity
- internal scientific, financial and legal approvals
- the management of international work
- conflicts of interest

Kew Reach provides a consistent framework to manage these requirements and reduce risk.

Benefits

By using a consulting-based approach, Kew's expertise can be applied to real-world decisions at scale, ensuring scientific evidence informs policy, investment and delivery.

The model strengthens the impact of publicly funded expertise while protecting academic independence through clear governance and oversight. It also supports **professional development**, by creating valuable opportunities for staff to apply their expertise to practical challenges and gain recognition for impact-driven work.

Finally, consulting income contributes to organisational resilience, with Kew Reach handling client relationships and project administration so that researchers can concentrate on technical input.

Quick tips

- Consulting contracts can be delivered through different models in the public sector, depending on the size, number and the nature of the opportunities.
- In this case study Kew established a joint venture – Kew Reach – to enable delivery of specialised applied work at scale.
- Before entering consulting contracts, publicly owned research organisations should consider what processes they need to put in place.
- It is beneficial to have a defined start to finish process for managing consulting contracts.



Giving expert advice as a Regulator – HSE supporting a safe national hydrogen highway

In 2021 the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) supported the Port of London Authority (PLA) in understanding the risks associated with introducing a national hydrogen transport and refuelling network. This work helped the PLA plan for the **safe introduction of hydrogen infrastructure** within a complex and safety-critical port environment. HSE provided technical assessment and expert advice.

Partnering organisation

The PLA is responsible for managing one of the UK's most important maritime and logistics systems and plays a key role in enabling future low-carbon transport solutions.

The PLA approached HSE for its recognised **expertise in major hazard risk management**. Hydrogen offers significant opportunities for decarbonisation, but it also introduces novel safety challenges. The PLA sought independent and authoritative advice to reduce uncertainty, assure safe progress and understand potential safety related barriers to progress at an early stage.

Considerations

HSE ensured that **governance, approvals and scope were clearly defined**, reflecting the advisory nature of the work. Potential conflicts of interest were carefully managed, maintaining HSE's independence as a regulator. This ensured the work was delivered transparently, credibly and to high professional standards. By engaging early, HSE acted as an enabling regulator, helping industry design out risks while gaining clearer insight into emerging challenges. This enabled a focus on practical, collaborative problem-solving that benefits both sides.

Benefits to HSE

This work strengthened HSE's role as a trusted enabler of clean energy infrastructure, **enhancing its reputation** as a source of authoritative expertise on hydrogen safety. It supported professional development in emerging technologies and generated **transferable learning** applicable to other hydrogen and net-zero projects.

Quick tips

- In this case study HSE worked directly with industry on a paid-for basis to support the safe deployment of new energy technologies.
- HSE has well-established procedures in place for ensuring there is no conflict of interest prior to embarking on any externally funded projects – this includes ensuring that the work aligns with HSE's strategic priorities.
- Publicly owned organisations should fully consider perceived and genuine conflicts of interests before entering into contracts with third parties.
- There should be processes in place to assess any risk to the regulatory function of an organisation prior to contracts being signed.
- Where a regulator is operating under statutory authority it is important to understand the extent and limits of that authority when introducing new services – if in doubt, consult your organisation's legal team.
- Provided due consideration is given, a regulator can use consulting as a commercialisation route.

Delivery of specialised training to support an international high-containment laboratory

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) entered a consulting contract with a global pharmaceutical to deliver a technical training programme to support them with implementing a new high-containment laboratory. Delivering this high-profile international training exemplified the agency's reputation as a world leader in biosafety, and supported the building of international relationships.

Background

The partner was establishing the facility, crucial to its research and development strategy, in Europe. They approached UKHSA due to its position as a global authority with over 60 years of operational and training experience in this highly specialised field.

UKHSA developed and delivered a tailored training framework for personnel working with high-risk pathogens. This included mock training in specialised facilities and follow-on training at the European site.

The partner required UKHSA's expertise to provide their national regulators with the necessary assurance that the new facility would be managed safely.

Considerations

The project underwent formal scrutiny through UKHSA's internal Opportunity Assessment Group to ensure alignment with the agency's priorities.

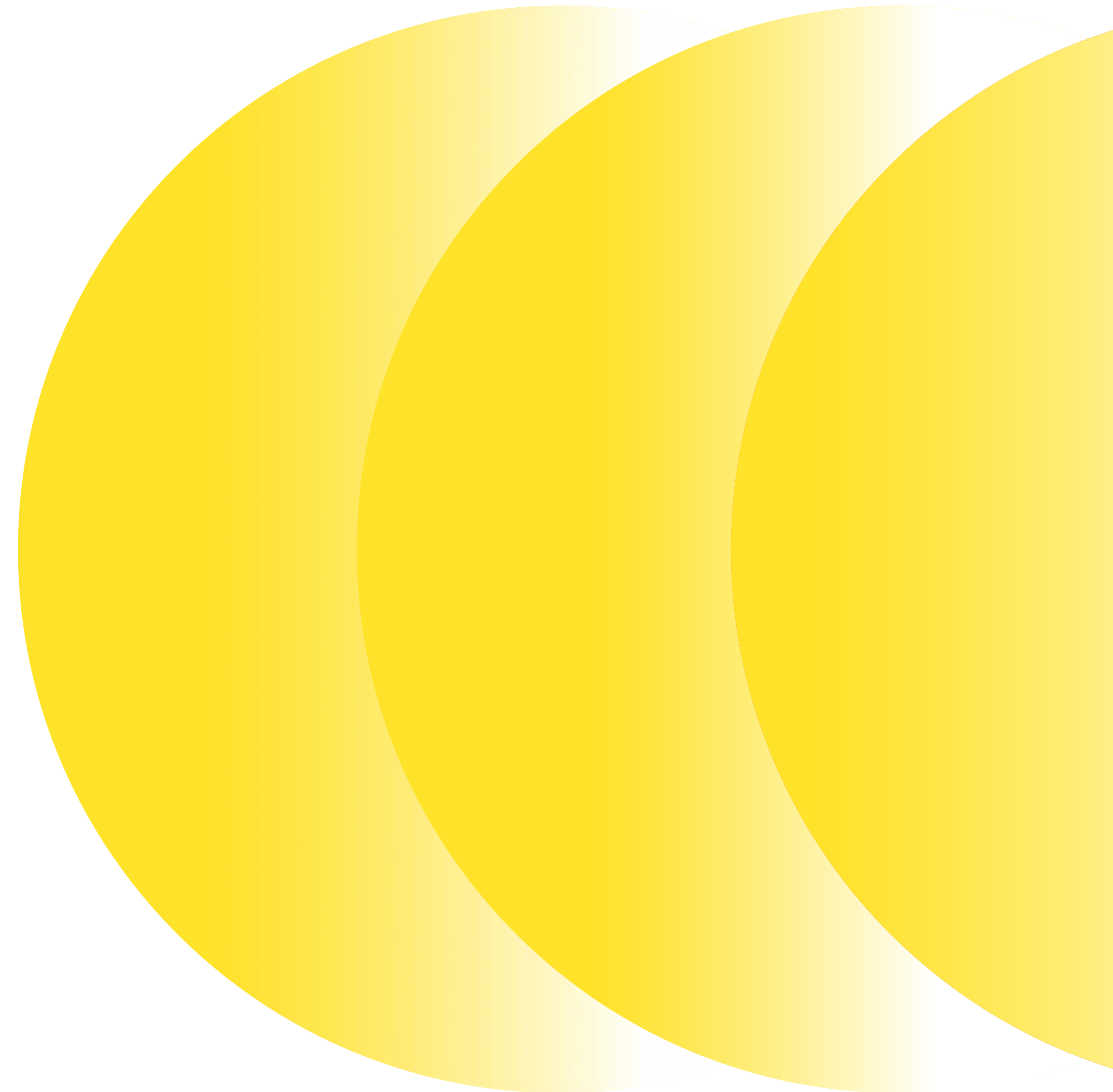
UKHSA delivered this on a full economic cost basis plus a surplus. This ensured that the commercial activity generated revenue for reinvestment into core health security capabilities that protect the UK.

The project allowed scientific and technical staff to apply their expertise to international commercial projects, which fostered skills in consulting and project management.

This leveraged the agency's world-leading expertise in specialised primary containment to ensure that the partner could operate safely and meet international safety standards.

Quick tips

- Consulting contracts are often entered into with organisations from overseas. They give public sector bodies the opportunity to access other markets and foster international collaboration.
- In this case, UKHSA had a unique selling point given their expertise in high-containment laboratories, so they were seen as a trusted source of advice.
- When partnering with bodies overseas, public sector bodies should assess whether doing so is appropriate and where necessary engage with FCDO.





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