Open Innovation Team

Year one review

University of Bath
Lancaster University
University of Southampton
WARWIC
THE UNIVERSITY OF WARW
Research Councils UK
Cabinet Office

Summary: a new Cabinet Office team funded by universities to deepen collaboration between policy-makers and academics

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Created a new Cabinet Office team at no cost to central government.
- Demonstrated a new way of partnering with academics that allows us to draw on their expertise in a structured, ongoing way.
- Collaborated with academics on numerous projects, including work on mental health for DH, industrial strategy for BEIS and childcare for No10.
- Established a Digital Government Partnership to collaborate with academics on the digital transformation of government.
- Set-up a new PhD placements programme.

CHALLENGES

- Setting-up good opportunities for academic input has been more difficult and time consuming than anticipated.
- Delivering "partner benefits" for our university sponsors has been tougher than expected.
- We'll need more staff at G6/7 to increase our impact in phase 2, though we can probably do this without government funding.
- We need to be more selective about which projects we take on and more ruthless about ending those that aren't delivering.

NEXT STEPS

- **Decide what happens after our pilot phase ends in Sep 2018.**
- Continue to increase the impact of our Digital Government Partnership.
- Create more partnerships to reduce the cost of setting-up projects, including an Economic Policy Network with HMT and others.
- Make our PhD placements programme.sustainable
- Increase awareness of our offer inside and outside Whitehall.

We help officials engage with academics and we work with them to produce tailored research and policy advice

The Open Innovation Team (originally called "Launchpad") was set-up in 2016, after the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Cabinet Secretary agreed to go ahead with a pilot.

We're sponsored by four leading universities - Bath, Lancaster, Southampton and Warwick - and supported by Research Councils UK, who have placed staff with us to help deliver policy projects and connect us to RCUK-funded research.

We're being incubated in Policy Lab during our pilot phase (which runs until Sep 2018) and we're part of EDS Projects' Future Policy Network, a group of Whitehall innovation teams. See annex A for the detail on how we decide projects.

We help departments in three main ways:

Engagement: we organise tailored policy conferences, university visits, seminars and networking events to help colleagues connect and collaborate with leading academics.

Research: we help officials research policy challenges and experiment with new technologies by collaborating with academics, either in groups or one-on-one.

Policy: we work with academics and other non-government experts to help colleagues develop evidence-led policy ideas.

We're not the only ones trying to improve links between officials and academics. See annex B for more detail.

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All our staff and project costs are covered by our university sponsors. They receive some benefits as part of the agreement

The universities of Bath, Lancaster, Southampton and Warwick are each contributing £125,000 over two years to help us experiment with ways of boosting collaboration with academia.

Research Councils UK have also supported us by placing two staff in our team on attachment for 2 days a week each.

Our relationship with our sponsors is not exclusive. We are free to collaborate with other universities or other outside experts as we wish. For example, we are working with Imperial College on digital transformation and LSE on economic policy.

Our package of university "partner benefits" includes the following:

- 2 university visits per year from Whitehall teams
- 2 Whitehall policy placements per year for university staff
- 1 talk per year from a senior official
- 1 Whitehall policy workshop for students
- Branding at Open Innovation Team events

Cabinet Office

Demand for our services is high. We're learning a lot and we're doing some good work with departments

We've been experimenting with different ways of collaborating with academics and supporting departments, including by arranging various kinds of events, embedding staff with departments for priority projects and inviting experienced academics to work with us as "Policy Fellows".

ECONOMY & LABOUR MARKETS

So far: set-up a seminar series and visits programme for BEIS, organised a half day conference on the future of work, collaborated with BEIS on policies to increase economic impact of universities.

Next steps: set-up an 'Economic Policy Network' to coordinate, prioritise and amplify this work.

MENTAL HEALTH

So far: embedded staff in DH for six months to help them deliver the CYP Mental Health paper, organised a conference to scope out EDS mental health work, recruited academics to research mental health transition points.

Next steps: offer DH, No10 & EDS a package of academic engagement and support on mental health.

CHILDCARE

So far: recruited an experienced academic from the University of Bath to act as a "Policy Fellow" advising No10 on childcare reform challenges and options. Produced two notes for No10 in the run up to Budget.

Next steps: continue to support CO and No10 colleagues analysing childcare reform options.

Our biggest project is the Digital Government Partnership, where we're working with academics to accelerate digital transformation

It was announced in the Digital Strategy in March that we would establish a Digital Government Partnership to accelerate digital transformation in government by deepening collaboration with academics and other outside experts.

Since then, we have scoped out the project with colleagues from GDS, DCMS and HMT and begun to implement our plans, including establishing a working level advisory group, organising digital themed events and visits and recruiting our first "Technology Fellow" from academia.

Work under way on Blockchain: an academic from Imperial is working with us for the next six months to help us experiment with the policy applications of distributed ledger technology, starting with digital evidence chains (see Annex C for more detail).

Scoping other projects, including on 5G and AI: we are working with colleagues to scope research in a number of other areas including digital design, web and social media analytics, 5G and machine learning.

Designing an approach to supporting the GovTech sector: we have been working with colleagues in HMT, GDS, DCMS and BEIS to design an approach to collaborating with GovTech companies.

We're trying to set-up similar partnerships to embed collaboration in other policy areas, including economy and labour markets

We're trying to find ways to improve **coordination** with departments, **prioritise** projects that will give us the greatest impact, **increase** our capacity so that we can achieve more and **embed** our approach so that it becomes part of normal Whitehall practice.

Economy & labour markets

We have a cluster of projects under way or under discussion in the economy and labour markets space. We are trying to build on this by setting-up an "Economic Policy Network" to deepen collaboration with academics. We expect this to be up and running by October 2017.

DCMS

Colleagues in DCMS have expressed an interest in receiving support across a range of areas, including 5G innovation and the Digital Charter. We are focusing most of our effort on introducing them to relevant academics and explaining how they can set up and run a partnership without intensive support.

DH, Defra, DfE, MoJ

Discussions with other departments are at earlier stages, but we hope to accelerate some of these when we have more capacity. For example, having embedded a member of our team in DH for six months to help with mental health policy, we are now looking to to offer them a wider package of academic support.

We deepen collaboration with experienced academics by recruiting them to work with us as Policy or Tech Fellows

We've been trying to find ways to deepen collaboration with experienced academics who can act as our technical experts or guides to evidence and work alongside us to design better policies.

When needed, these Policy Fellows receive CTC clearance and sign non-disclosure agreements to help us manage the risks associated with collaborating with non-government workers.

We initially planned to have experienced academics work with us on full time three month placements, but quickly found that a more flexible approach would work better for both academics and officials.

Examples of Policy/Tech Fellows recruited so far:

- **Susan Harkness**, University of Bath, supporting Cabinet Office work on childcare reform.
- **Sadek Ferdous**, Imperial College London, supporting work on Distributed Ledgers Technology.
- **Brian Litchfield-Cant**, University of Warwick, supporting work on mental health transitions.
- **Katy Mason** and **Chris Ford**, University of Lancaster, evaluating and helping to maximise our impact.

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We've also created a PhD placement programme to increase our capacity and support teams around Whitehall

To increase our capacity and improve our technical skills (e.g. on digital transformation), we have engaged Research Council-funded PhD programmes and offered their students Whitehall placements of 3-6 months, provided that the placement can be funded by the university.

The response from programme directors and PhD students has been very positive, with **about 50 PhDs expected to join our team or others we are working with over the next 12 months.** In our team alone, we expect to have 5-7 PhD students working alongside us at a time over the next year. See annex D for a diagram explaining how our team fits together.

Some examples of PhD interns::

- **Nick Girkin**, University of Nottingham, helped set-up our Digital Government Partnership and carried out housing research for No10.
- **Christian Butterworth,** University of Lancaster, managing our distributed ledgers project and scoping work on 5G and AI.
- **Sophia Peacock**, University of Cambridge, starting in September to help set-up our Economic Policy Network.

Next steps: it wouldn't be sustainable for our team to manage this scheme on an ongoing basis so we're speaking to colleagues across Whitehall to figure out how it can be mainstreamed.

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We're trying to inspire colleagues to follow our lead by organising events and explaining how others can replicate our approach

To help connect officials with academics over the next 12 months, we're creating a proactive programme of engagement, including Whitehall policy conferences, seminars, networking events and university visits.

Our visits and networking events are already under way and we're expecting to hold our first Whitehall policy conference in October to celebrate the launch of our Economic Policy Network.

We don't have enough capacity to meet Whitehall demand for our services so we're beginning to experiment with less intensive ways of helping colleagues who want to collaborate with academics.

We think one approach might be to update the Open Policy Making Toolkit created by Policy Lab.

Another, which we're already beginning to test with DCMS, might be to introduce departments to relevant academics and sketch out a plan for them before leaving them to deliver it with only minimal support from us.

It hasn't all been plain sailing. We're adapting as we go and working with academics to evaluate our approach

We've achieved much more than expected in our first year, but there's plenty of room for improvement. Innovation experts from the University of Lancaster are evaluating our approach and helping us understand how we can do better.

CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

Finding good opportunities for academic input has been harder than expected so we're investing time in establishing partnerships that we think will generate more high impact projects.	We've probably taken on more work than we should at times so we're becoming more selective about which projects we take on and more ruthless about ending those that aren't delivering.	We need to do more to embed our approach with colleagues. Efforts to raise awareness, develop a toolkit and establish partnership structures should help with this.
Delivering partner benefits is proving tougher than expected, especially university visits and talks from senior officials. We've beefed up our comms and events resources to help with this.	We've tried to keep a low profile to avoid over burdening ourselves, but it's time we made more of an effort to raise awareness of what we're doing inside and outside Whitehall.	We've managed to create a reasonable sized team (about 10 FTE) without any investment from central government, but we'll need to recruit more staff at G6/7 to increase our impact in phase 2.

Next steps: continue to deepen collaboration and decide what happens after our pilot phase ends in Sep 2018

1. **Decide what happens after our pilot phase ends in Sep 2018.** We will submit advice on this before the end of the year.
2. Continue to embed and **increase the impact of our Digital Government Partnership**, where we collaborate with outside experts to accelerate digital transformation
3. **Establish an Economic Policy Network** to deepen collaboration with academics on economic and labour markets policy.
4. **Create a Policy Fellows network** to improve links with leading academics and make it easier to draw on their support to meet policy needs.
5. **Mainstream our PhD placement programme** to increase its impact and make it sustainable.
6. **Increase awareness of our work** inside and outside Whitehall.

Annex A: how we decide which projects to take on

IDEA

Commissioning Board

The Cabinet Secretary's Commissioning Board has asked us to support work on mental health, housing and other topics

Departments

More of our work comes direct from departments, including projects for BEIS and DCMS.

Partnerships

A growing share of our work comes through partnerships, especially our Digital Government Partnership.

DECISION

After scoping a project, we'll decide whether and how we can participate based on considerations around our proposed role, resource requirements, departmental buy-in and the potential impact of the project.

OUTPUT

Mini

Signpost to guidance on how to collaborate with academics or meet to explain how departments can do it themselves.

Midi

Map the relevant academic communities, arrange meetings to introduce officials and academics, explain how they can follow-up.

Maxi

Intensive ongoing support designed to help officials collaborate with academics and work-up policy ideas.

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Annex B: how we complement other efforts to improve links between academics and policy-makers

The boxes below explain how the Open Innovation Team complements other teams and initiatives operating in a similar space. All the teams and projects listed here do valuable work and many have been supporting us while we've been setting up the Open Innovation Team. We believe their functions are complementary to what we've been doing.

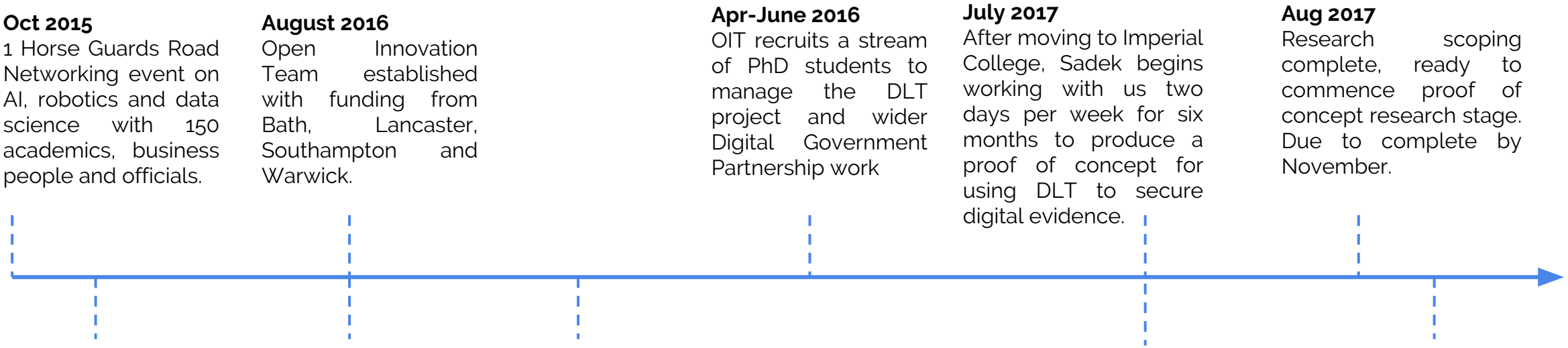
Government efforts

1. GO Science is geared more towards providing high-quality analysis. Our blockchain project is an example of where we've followed-up on GO Science's work.
2. EDS Projects is focused on EDS and other Cabinet Office priorities. We often help them engage with academics.
3. Policy Lab focuses on introducing new policy techniques to departments and helping design services around people's experiences. There has been little overlap between our projects so far.
4. Cabinet Office's Accelerator programme is about generating ideas to make the Cabinet Office a better place to work.
5. Cabinet Office Policy Schools are primarily about learning and development for civil servants. They are not designed to develop ideas in priority areas or respond to specific departmental demands.

Non-government efforts

1. Research Councils have been investing in increasing the policy impact of research for years, including by weaving impact measures into funding awards and by setting-up impact related initiatives.
2. More recently, Research Councils have awarded some universities funding to boost their impact. We have tapped into this to help fund collaboration.
3. A number of universities have recently set-up specialist policy units. We tend to collaborate with these units when we encounter them.
4. Cambridge, Bath and other universities are creating networks of Policy Fellows, officials who benefit from closer engagement with academics.
5. The Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology (POST) concentrates on parliament.

Annex C: Distributed Ledger Technology project case study



Oct 2015
1 Horse Guards Road Networking event on AI, robotics and data science with 150 academics, business people and officials.

August 2016
Open Innovation Team established with funding from Bath, Lancaster, Southampton and Warwick.

Apr-June 2016
OIT recruits a stream of PhD students to manage the DLT project and wider Digital Government Partnership work

July 2017
After moving to Imperial College, Sadek begins working with us two days per week for six months to produce a proof of concept for using DLT to secure digital evidence.

Aug 2017
Research scoping complete, ready to commence proof of concept research stage. Due to complete by November.

Dec 2016
Follow-up workshop for officials and academics interested in developing ideas further.

August 2016
Detailed scoping work begins with DLT cross Whitehall Community of Interest. Using DLT to secure digital evidence chains identified as a possible use case.

Sep 2016
Southampton University identifies a suitable academic, Sadek Ferdous, who is willing to work in Whitehall on placement.

July 2017
OIT reconvenes DLT Community of Interest with an event at 1 Horse Guards Road. Invites other interested academics to get involved.

Sep 2017
OIT and DLT Community of Interest begin scoping other possible DLT research projects and organising future DLT events.

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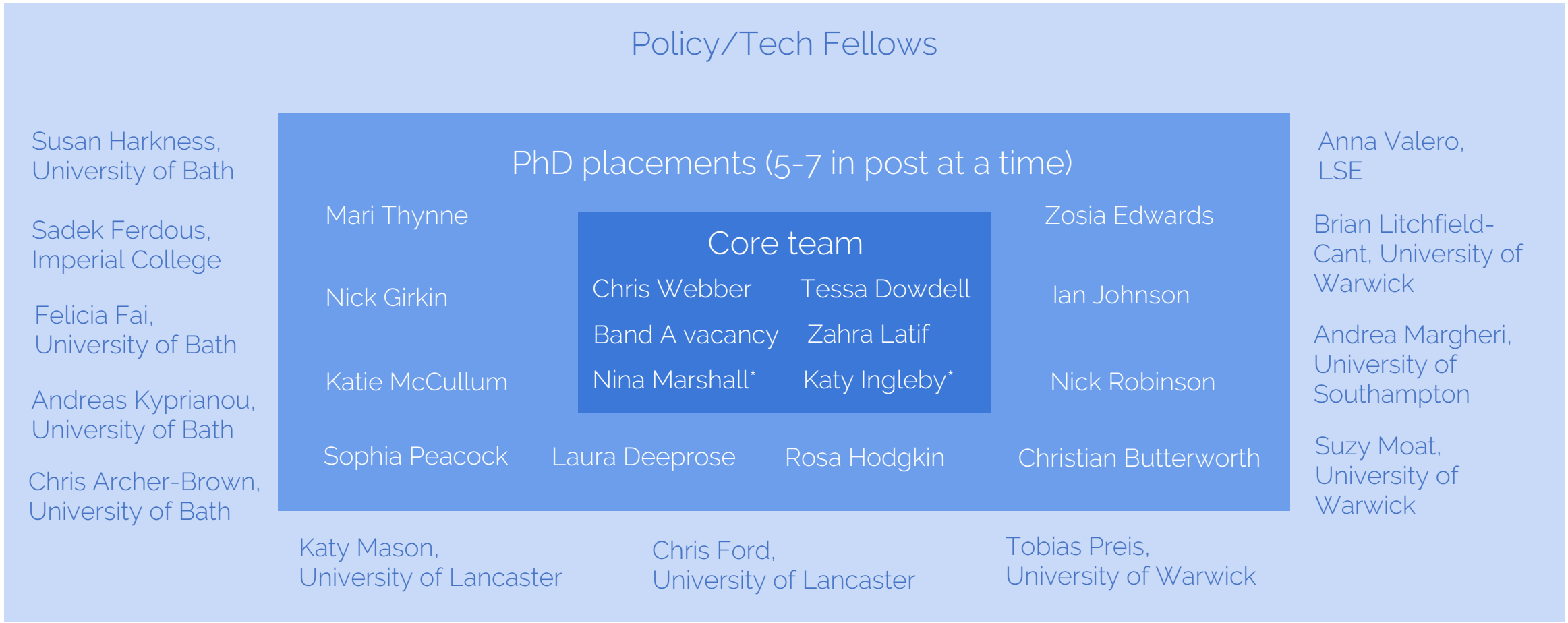
Annex D: core team, PhD students and Fellows



*RCUK staff on attachment

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