

# Aspect

## Request for Quotation: Aspect Impact Evaluation

**Prepared by:** Aspect Programme Management Team  
on behalf of the Aspect Operations Group and Steering Group

**Date:** February 2023

### 1 Overview

The Aspect Network is seeking a supplier to conduct a small-scale evaluation of *outcomes and impact from Aspect members' commercialisation activities*, which can be used in communicating the value of the Aspect programme to UK funding bodies and senior leadership within Aspect member institutions.

Proposals from interested suppliers may be sent to [oxentia@aspect.ac.uk](mailto:oxentia@aspect.ac.uk) by 12:00 noon on 15 March 2023. See more details in the RFQ document.

### 2 Aims: Evidence to Support Aspect Sustainability

#### 2.1 About Aspect

Aspect (A SHAPE<sup>1</sup> Platform for Entrepreneurship, Commercialisation and Transformation) is a network of 46 higher education institutes (HEIs) and partner organisations, who are working together to make the most of commercial and business opportunities from social sciences, humanities, and arts (SHAPE) research outputs. See **section 7.1** for more about Aspect.

#### 2.2 Rationale and aims

The Aspect Network is preparing plans for 'Aspect 3.0', which includes a new programme and funding model to sustain Aspect when the current funding period ends on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023. The intention is to move to a membership-fee based model to fund the core operations, and supplement this with other sources of funding and partnerships.

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<sup>1</sup> SHAPE (Social Sciences Humanities & the Arts for People and the Economy) <https://thisisshape.org.uk>

To help in building a case for external funding and/or continued institutional participation, Aspect members have identified a need to gather more data on the *outcomes* and (forecasted) *impact* of the programme. Currently reporting and KPIs for Aspect have focused on the *activities* and *outputs*, along with institutional learnings about good practice (see **section 7.2** for more on existing reporting and data).

The Aspect network is seeking proposals for an external supplier to conduct a small-scale social and economic impact evaluation of commercialisation activities resulting from or influenced by the Aspect programme to date. The evaluation (and accompanying report) would need to be completed by mid-September 2022. The data generated through the evaluation would be used to help:

- Make the case to external funders for continued (or new) support
- Make the case to senior leaders within Aspect member institutions, for continued participation in the network.

### 2.3 Scope and Assumptions

The primary focus of the evaluation is to gather data related **external impact from Aspect members' commercialisation activities** (and if applicable, business engagement and wider knowledge exchange) resulting from or influenced by Aspect. These activities may have occurred directly as a result of an Aspect-funded activity, or indirectly as a result of members who participate in and have learned from Aspect's programme (leading to institutional capacity-building and peer-knowledge sharing).

However, our assumptions are that:

1. Members are still at the stage of building their pipeline and innovation portfolios. As such most of the SHAPE ventures and innovators we support have not yet reached the market/ are not at the point of generating large scale economic impact.
2. SHAPE commercialisation often starts with consultancy, business engagement, or knowledge exchange activities. Tracking or reporting on these activities could be a way to demonstrate pipeline building/ a pre-cursor to commercialisation; however, this is anecdotal rather than evidenced.
3. SHAPE innovators and commercialisation projects often do not have patentable Intellectual Property
4. SHAPE innovators and commercialisation projects usually do not need to raise as much investment to get to market, and may not fit the investment profile for a 'traditional' investor
5. SHAPE innovators and commercialisation projects often (but not always) have a smaller economic impact compared to the potential for scale/growth, revenue, and jobs from more 'traditional' STEM ventures. This is due in part because of:
  - a. Nearly half of the SHAPE innovations we see in our pipelines are delivered via service or consultancy-based business.
  - b. SHAPE academics are sometimes likely to favour a social enterprise or social impact driven commercialisation strategy (over economic value)

Therefore, we are looking for an evaluation approach that will incorporate the following:

1. Suggest a framework for conducting the evaluation
2. Suggest an approach to measuring both social and economic impact, and/or, if we cannot measure it directly, suggest a *proxy* measure or approach to forecast the *potential* impact.
3. Provide contextual framing or evidence for why these numbers reported in the evaluation may (or may not) be different than those we expect of STEM ventures, and/or provide guidance on what the standard/bar should be for measuring economic impact from SHAPE ventures (for example, how expectations for growth, income, jobs etc. may differ given the profile of the ventures and innovations we support vs traditional metrics of success)
4. If possible within the timeframe and budget, provide suggestions for the types of projects or data that might be useful to feature in case studies showcasing the nature and impact of SHAPE commercialisation.

## 2.4 What methods and measures are expected

Whilst we expect the supplier to propose the most appropriate method given the budget and aims of this evaluation, we would expect a mixed-methods approach (e.g., not purely an economic evaluation) is more feasible to include a range of social and economic indicators of impact.

Below is a list of initial thoughts on the types of data or indicators we believe might be useful to report on, however, these are not fixed, and we would expect the supplier to suggest the most appropriate given the aims of the project and size of the budget (or to include this activity at the start of the project). Single asterisks refer to existing data or ongoing complementary activities that could feed into the project (see **section 7.2** for more on these).

1. Focus on external impact (not internal, unless it has an economic implication, i.e., cost savings or otherwise)
2. Economic impact of the companies that have come from ARC and other member activities (turnover etc)
  - a. Could the evaluation gather data on economic impact for both/either incorporated (forecast or actual) and idea-stage (forecast) ventures?
  - b. In Aspect's annual KPI reporting, members reported <5 companies have been incorporated in 2022. KPI data will be gathered again in 2023. \*
  - c. There are also 35+ ventures that have participated in the Aspect Research Commercialisation Accelerator ([ARC](#)), and several more academics participating in pre-accelerator programmes.\*\*
3. Economic impact to business partners
  - a. Value of university-businesses collaborations to the business that the SHAPE academics have partnered with (i.e., business engagement activities is

worth x amount of value to the companies who were engaged; number of new products or services, jobs created and protected, etc.)

4. Economic impact to members
  - a. Revenue from consultancy (within the university consultancy services vs as a consultancy business/spinout)
  - b. Grant funding or other income generated from collaborations with businesses, etc.
5. Size of members' pipeline
  - a. And commentary/ evidence for scale of future potential impact this demonstrates
  - b. NB: we already have data on increase in pipeline (from Member Survey\* and from KPI reporting), and the TIAH project aims to also set up a pipeline tracker across 6 members.
  - c. We plan to ask members for an update on their pipelines in the 2023 Membership Survey. \*
6. Social impact
  - a. Providing an indication of the range of social impacts achieved, or impacts that are expected, and commentary on this;
  - b. If we are not yet in the position to actually measure it, provide commentary or suggest measures that could be considered.

### 3 Constraints

**Scope.** We recognise this is a small-scale study, and we are looking for the supplier to advise on what is realistic within the budget, and what sort of impacts you might be able to measure. In some cases where there is not sufficient data to measure impact yet, we expect suppliers to consider if there are proxies or alternative ways of reporting impact.

**Support.** The Aspect Programme Team will be available to work in collaboration with the selected supplier during the project. Please indicate in your proposal what support, input, data etc. you envision you might need from the Aspect Programme Team.

**Existing Data and Activities.** We expect the supplier will need to engage with the Aspect membership in some way to gather the data. The Programme Management Team can provide the supplier with existing KPI data and other surveys and reports that have been generated by the membership to date. There are also several *ongoing* activities that could complement or feed into the impact evaluation. We welcome suggestions from the supplier as to how we could best coordinate or work together on these complementary activities to make the best use of the evaluation budget. (See **section 7.2.1** for an overview of other complementary activities, and **section 7.2.2** for a list of possible background reading/ existing data sources).

**Timelines.** The supplier should be aware that although most Aspect projects and activities will end by 30 June 2023, some will be ongoing through the end of September 2023. The

annual Member Survey also will be happening in the summer period, and can be leveraged to gather additional data from the membership if needed.

## 4 Deliverables

The results of the evaluation should be submitted as a final report, in an editable Microsoft Word document format, and should be suitable in content, tone and quality such that it could potentially be shared and disseminated publicly. Supplemental materials for internal dissemination (Aspect only) may be submitted as required.

We understand that designing the report may not be feasible within the budget of this project, however, an Aspect-branded Word template can be provided upon request.

To ensure the report meets the needs of the Aspect membership, if it is feasible, we recommend including in your proposal an interim milestone draft, and a period for incorporating feedback and revisions to that draft.

## 5 Budget

The maximum cost for this project is £20,000 including VAT.

We are aware this is a relatively small budget given the potential scope of work, and we are looking for suggestions in your proposals on how to best deliver the aims of the evaluation, including realistic outputs and timelines.

It is possible additional budget may become available by or before July 2023. If the supplier has suggestions for how additional budget could be used to expand or increase the impact of the evaluation, you may include this in your proposal as an optional add-on piece of work. The add-on would also need to be completed within the project timeline.

## 6 RFQ Details

This work will be contracted through Oxentia Ltd, who provides Programme Management for to the Aspect Network on behalf of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

Submissions should be limited to a maximum of 10 pages, and should include:

- Your relevant experience, including knowledge of social impact measurement in addition to 'traditional' ways of measuring KEC impact.
- An overview of how you plan to deliver this work, including what data or other support you would require from the Aspect Programme Team, or Aspect members.
- Your proposed timeline for delivery of the work.
- Cost of delivering the work.

We will assess proposals based on track record (20%), proposed approach (60%), and value for money (20%).

Please submit questions/ proposals to [oxentia@aspect.ac.uk](mailto:oxentia@aspect.ac.uk), in line with the timelines below:

- 15 February – Launch Call
- 3 March – Questions Due by 12:00 noon
- 15 March – Proposals Due by 12:00 noon
- March/April – Clarifications, Decisions, and Contracting
- April – Project Start \*
- September – Project End\*

\* The final deliverable must be received by mid-September. The project start date is flexible and suppliers may suggest alternatives in line with your proposed workplan/ project timeline.

## 7 Supplemental Information

### 7.1 About Aspect

Aspect (A SHAPE<sup>2</sup> Platform for Entrepreneurship, Commercialisation and Transformation) is a network of 46 higher education institutes (HEIs) and partner organisations, who are working together to make the most of commercial and business opportunities from social sciences, humanities, and arts (SHAPE) research outputs. More on Aspect's mission and vision can be read on the website <https://aspect.ac.uk/>.

#### 7.1.1 Funding

Aspect was launched in 2018 with funding from Research England's Connecting Capability Fund (CCF). In 2021 Aspect received follow-on funding from Research England to continue the network for another two years, as well as additional funding from ESRC to support Aspect's ARC programme.

#### 7.1.2 Programme

In its first (nearly) five years of operations, Aspect has built an ecosystem to support SHAPE commercialisation, building awareness of the challenges and opportunities for SHAPE commercialisation, developing capacity and skills, and identifying areas of good practice. To achieve this, it has delivered a programme consisting of: [Communities of Practice](#), [Funded Projects](#), Dissemination and Knowledge Sharing (Website, [events](#) etc.) Over 200 [resources](#) have been generated by the members and funded projects (most of which can be found on the Aspect website), including [Annual Learning Reports](#) and a [Toolkit](#).

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### **7.1.3 Membership**

Aspect [membership](#) is open to any HEI, from the UK or abroad, and is currently free to join, subject to signing a letter of commitment. Other (non-HEI) members will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Currently Aspect has only one non-HEI member (Zinc), and 44 HEI members. Aspect membership is comprised of 'Associate' and 'Consortium' Members. Consortium membership is limited to the 11 institutions listed on the funding application.

### **7.1.4 Governance**

Aspect is governed by a Steering Group (SG) and Operations Group (OG) comprised of representatives from each Consortium members institution. The SG meet every 6 months and takes strategic decisions. The OG meets every two months and prepares plans and decisions to be taken to the SG. The OG and SG are supported by a Programme Management Team (delivered by Oxentia Ltd) and Marketing Manager. The Consortium's Lead Institution is the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), manages the budget, oversees the programme management team and marketing manager, and chairs the SG and Advisory Board.

## **7.2 Complementary Activities and Existing Data**

### **7.2.1 Ongoing Activities**

The Programme Management Team is responsible for conducting a survey of the membership in summer 2023, and we are open to suggestions for how this activity could be combined with eh evaluation or complement it. (The 2022 survey questions can be provided upon request, and the results can be provided to the winning supplier).

The Aspect TIAH project will also be conducting an evaluation covering both internal and external impact (including numbers of projects progressing through stages in their pipeline, number of academic queries, self-reported measures of confidence and knowledge, etc.) and has developed a tool for tracking the pipelines of the 6 members participating in that project. It is possible (TBC) this tracking approach could be used by the evaluators to gather pipeline data from the wider membership.

The Aspect Angels Network project is doing needs assessment, to understand how many SHAPE ventures exist within member's portfolios, and the scale of investment needs they may have. The timelines for this activity are being informed, but this could input into the evaluation.

There are also several funded-projects ongoing that are generating case studies about business engagement and commercialisation the social sciences, and these case studies may include some narrative data about impact. The supplier may wish to coordinate or speak with these projects as a source of data for the evaluation/ to complement the evaluation.

### **7.2.2 Existing Data on Outputs and/or Learnings**

The Aspect network reports KPIs annually to Research England, its funders. Currently Aspect's annual reporting focusses on i) outputs of the programme and ii) the learnings from the programme (via a Learning Gain report and/or Survey of the Membership).

We expect the supplier will need to familiarise themselves with the Aspect programme at the start of the contract. Additional documents and data can be provided at that time, including, but not limited to the following:

1. Contextual information
  - a. **Research England (RE) CCF Evaluation** – RE has conducted an interim evaluation at a programme level which could provide background context.
  - b. **Member Onboarding Pack** – provides an overview of the Aspect programme (useful contextual information to understand what comprises the programme).
  - c. **Aspect Forum 2022 Participant Pack (x2)** – Includes profiles/descriptions of Aspects funded projects from 2021-2022. This is helpful contextual information about the types of activities (and what data they may be generating).
  - d. **The Aspect website** – includes over 200 resources generated by Aspect-funded projects (lower priority, but useful to be aware of).
2. Existing materials used to engage the target audience for this evaluation
  - a. **Slide deck** used to communicate Aspect's value proposition to prospective funders (May 2022)
  - b. **Slide deck** used to communicate Aspect's value and vision to prospective members
3. Existing data points
  - a. **Aspect Learning Gain Report 2021** – Annual summary of insights on best practice in SHAPE innovation, from the Aspect membership (produced 2019–2021). The 2021 report includes some data on size of member's pipelines and perceptions on institutional change, along with data about learnings on good practice, and individual project learnings. 2019 and 2020 reports are perhaps outdated and lower priority
  - b. **Research England KPI reporting x 4 years** – spreadsheet with numeric data on programme outputs (rather than impacts). Nine KPIs are reported each year (see next **section 7.3** for a list of Aspect KPIs).
  - c. **2022 Member Survey Results/ Questions** – The survey is a KPI requirement and will be re-run in 2023. The survey asks questions about members' pipelines, learnings, challenges, etc. The question set can be modified if required to support the evaluation.
  - d. **TIAH Tracker/ Pipeline data – TBC** what data we would we be able to share
4. Existing Aspect Case studies and Examples of SHAPE Innovation



- a. [Case Studies – Aspect](#) – this page is a compilation of three projects to generate case studies showing tips on how to commercialise SHAPE, and the commercialisation journey
- b. [Aspect Research Commercialisation \(ARC\) Accelerator – Project Profiles](#) – Scroll down on the project page to view profiles of the researchers/ventures who have participated in the programme.
- c. [Methods for Change](#)– The project has been generating a library of “how to guides” showing how SHAPE research methods can be applied to real world problems.

### 7.3 Aspect KPIs

Aspect KPIs for Years 1 and 2 of CCF Follow-on Funding (including narrative where appropriate)		
	1st Oct 2021–30th Sept. 2022	1st Oct 2022 – 30 Sept 2023
KPI 01	400 academic social science researchers attend training & development events forming part of the Aspect programme.	550 academic SHAPE researchers attend training & development events forming part of the Aspect programme.
KPI 02	Five ventures/vehicles (including social enterprises) created with support from Aspect funded Activities. Narrative reporting on this KPI to include summary statements on 1) nature of the projects supported through Aspect funded activities in terms of social science discipline and/or alignment with SDGs; and 2) the business model (e.g., social enterprises, social science businesses, products or services).	Five ventures/vehicles (including social enterprises) created with support from Aspect funded Activities. Narrative reporting on this KPI to include summary statements on 1) nature of the projects supported through Aspect funded activities in terms of SHAPE discipline and/or alignment with SDGs; and 2) the business model (e.g., social enterprises, social science businesses, products or services).
KPI 03	50 New social science innovation collaborations with business (incl. social enterprises), initiated from Aspect funded activities.	60 New SHAPE innovation collaborations with business (incl. social enterprises), initiated from Aspect funded activities.
KPI 04	A 10% uplift on average in social sciences projects within membership innovation ‘pipelines’.	Further increases (additional 10%) in SHAPE projects within memberships innovation ‘pipelines’.
KPI 05	100 Students / alumni (excludes ECRs, PGRs) receiving entrepreneurship training through Aspect funded activity.	100 Students / alumni (excludes ECRs, PGRs) receiving entrepreneurship training through Aspect funded activity.
KPI 06	At least two Interdisciplinary collaborations involving social sciences with STEM (including work with MTSC). MTSC are working with LSE at present to better understand what this collaboration will look like.	At least four Interdisciplinary collaborations involving SHAPE subjects with STEM (including work with MTSC). MTSC are working with LSE at present to better understand what this collaboration will look like.
KPI 07	Leveraged funding / Diversification of funding: a) Institutional investment (For capacity building, infrastructure and support of social sciences commercialisation activities). b) Including CiK across the membership. c) Leverage resulting from Aspect projects/new collabs with 3rd parties.	Leveraged funding / Diversification of funding: a) Institutional investment (For capacity building, infrastructure and support of SHAPE commercialisation activities) b) Including CiK across the membership. c) Leverage resulting from Aspect projects / new collaborations with 3rd parties.
KPI 08	Membership experience on Aspect, collated via a survey covering e.g., member satisfaction, participation, demand for participation in ARC, M4C for example.]	Completion of an Independent evaluation of the capacity building and impact supported through Aspect membership and funding. Evidence to include case studies as a narrative output.

		Evidence to include sustainability of ARC and other Aspect offerings.
KPI 09	10 % year on year growth in Aspect membership, including international participants. 20% increased engagement with network outputs, training, website, activities from HEIs (members and non-members), national and international.	10 % year on year growth in Aspect membership, including international participants. 20% increased engagement with network outputs, training, website, activities from HEIs (members and non-members), national and international). Agree a formal collaboration/ partnership with a national and/or international KEC membership body.