



**EASTERN
ARC** Academic Research
Consortium



**Annual
Report
2024-25**



Welcome to Eastern Arc's Annual Report 2024-25

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In a time of challenge and change for the sector, the importance of working together has never been clearer.

In the past year, the Eastern Arc members have redoubled their commitment to the consortium, and have achieved a significant amount as a result.

This commitment was also demonstrated in the launch of Eastern Arc's new five year strategy, through which the four universities--UEA, Essex, Kent and Sussex--look forward to working together for the benefit of the wider community, regionally, nationally and internationally.

The Strategy is built around four thematic priorities that help to define our region, from the

Wash down to Sussex Bay: Coast, Food, Heritage and Sanctuary.

These are areas of national importance for which we have significant experience, knowledge and strength, and within which we recognise fundamental needs and opportunities.

Over the next five years we will seek to work together to address the needs and build on the opportunities.

We will do so through our three 'pillars' of activity that lie at the heart of our endeavour: collaboration, culture and advocacy.

This report will outline the strategy in more detail, but will also give witness to how it is already working in practice, from the links forged and the funding secured, to the support given, the talent nurtured, and the national policy steered.

In these changing times standing together has never been more important, and as we continue to deal with uncertainty, we can do so safe in the knowledge that we stand strong and together as a consortium of creative, open and innovative equals.

Phil Ward
Director of Eastern Arc

OUR NEW STRATEGY 2025-30

In 2023 Eastern Arc celebrated its tenth anniversary. A decade after being established, we have realised our original vision: to be a 'substantial and sustained collaboration,' bold in our ambition and inclusive in our reach.

Together, we are an alliance of equals, independent and passionate about the communities of which we're part, but recognising the common strengths and the common needs of our universities and our regions.

Through our work, we will build on our history of radical difference to forge a positive template for regional collaboration.

It will not always be easy, and we recognise that in many areas we will have to change mindsets and ingrained outlooks. However it is a challenge worth facing: by coming together, by sharing our knowledge, our skills and our resources, we will address specific threats and opportunities of our time to help create a sustainable, peaceful and equitable future for our region and beyond.

OUR VISION

Our vision is to collaborate to deliver real, tangible and positive change in four areas that both define our region and impact the world: coast, food, heritage and sanctuary.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to develop and galvanise intersectoral networks that will enable shared understanding and lead to joint ventures, adding value through collaboration, culture and advocacy.

WORKING TOGETHER THREE PILLARS OF ACTIVITY

Eastern Arc complements and supports the work that each of its members is doing individually. It does not seek to duplicate, but instead is built on three pillars that offer additional and equal benefit

COLLABORATION

Collaboration underpins all of our work. It is central to our research and innovation, but it is equally important for our professional and technical services. Collaboration allows us to learn from each other and share our knowledge and experience for mutual benefit, and for the benefit of our region. It stretches across our universities, but also links and anchors us with the external stakeholders, regional businesses, local authorities, and other organisations within our communities.

CULTURE

The importance of a positive and supportive research culture goes back to the founding principles of our members as 'alternative' institutions, fundamentally more collegiate and egalitarian than many of the universities that predated them.

As a consortium we have provided mentoring for all staff, opened up training across the Arc, and sought to champion those whose voices are heard less in the research ecosystem.

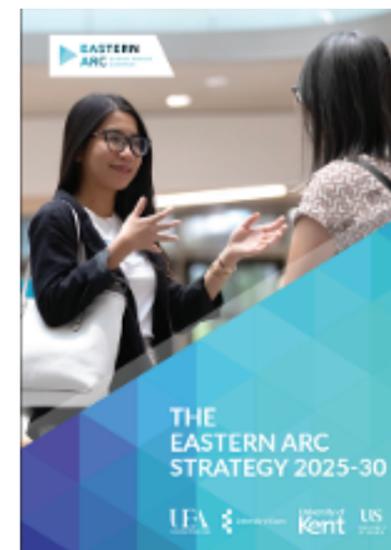
ADVOCACY

We are proud of our universities and the region of which they are part. As such, we have actively spoken out on their behalf, responding to government plans and funder proposals that have not always taken on board the views of the diverse majority.

We will continue to do so, engaging in the wider conversation on a broad range of issues, from devolution to the future of research and innovation funding in the UK.

Find out more

To understand the background to the Strategy, and to read it in full, go to <https://bit.ly/EARCstrategy> or click on the QR code



FOOD

We will collaborate to develop a fair, equitable and healthy food system for all

COAST

We will work together to build a strong, resilient future for our coast

HERITAGE

We will use our heritage to nurture pride, social cohesion and economic prosperity

SANCTUARY

We will create an arc of sanctuary to provide safety, opportunity and wellbeing



'The Golden Circle': EARC secures Research England grant for project tech transfer

September 2024

In June the Eastern Arc universities, together with partner universities in the Greater South East, secured funding from Research England to develop an innovative platform for sharing tech-transfer capabilities.

UEA, Essex, Kent and Sussex, Reading, RHUL and Brighton formed a 'golden circle' around London that sought to offer a template for a different way of working.

Close collaboration led to a strong and unified spin-out ecosystem built on trust, openness and innovative working.

The six-month project created online courses, financial templates and spin-out guides that are free to members of all seven partners.

The Golden Triangle is now working to build on this success and will explore further funding to embed the system and ensure it's long-term sustainability.

In the meantime the resources from the project are available on its dedicated website at www.golden-circle.co.uk

CODA

The Coastal Data Network

Using data to improve the health of coastal communities



Coda Network Seminar Series launched

May 2025

Following the official launch of the Coda - or Coastal Data - Network in 2024, we launched a bimonthly seminar series in 2025. These are intended to raise awareness and share best practice in the collection and sharing of health data across our region, and topics have included:

- Learning to share data: the experience of the Suffolk Office for Data Analytics (SODA);
- NHS Secure Data Environments (SDEs);
- Youth mental health in coastal communities: what do the data tell us?
- The Coastal Navigators Network: addressing the wider determinants of ill-health;
- Marmot Places and coastal inequalities: a framework for action.

In addition, Coda has explored funding opportunities (including being involved in two applications to the NIHR), and has led training for health workers in Norfolk and Waveney (see box below).

Norfolk and Waveney ICB Enhance Workshop 14 May 2025, Scratby, Norfolk

EARC worked with N&W ICB to deliver a workshop for primary health and social care professionals in the region. Approximately 40 participants were involved, from a range of trusts, partnerships, and practices, who together explored how a range of data could be mapped to understand the wider determinants of ill-health, as well as being supported in accessing and exploring the resources for doing so.

Full details of Coda, including recordings of previous webinars, discussion papers and information on how to join, are available via the link below, or by clicking on the QR code. www.easternarc.ac.uk/coda



Harnessing Heritage

September 2024

The annual conference 2024 took place at UEA and focussed on 'Harnessing Heritage'.

The East and Southeast of England are rich in both built, cultural and natural heritage. Their long histories of trade and transport, religion and warfare, migration, pilgrimage and pleasure have meant that the regions have a significant number of heritage assets.

Many of these benefit local communities economically, but also give a sense of identity and pride to them. As such they can play an important part in individual wellbeing and social cohesion.

This one day conference sought to identify ways that universities, regional and national organisations, and local communities could work together for the benefit of all and to safeguard future prosperity.

150 delegates registered, representing 60 organisations. The initial 'provocation' asked whether the UK's seaside heritage could be listed as a UNESCO world heritage site, before delegates explored any of the 10 breakout sessions, including topics including:

- The use of immersive tech and AI to explore heritage;
- Heritage and wellbeing;
- Climate change and cultural heritage;
- Regional art and archives;
- Preventing heritage crime.

The day finished with a panel session involving the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and Arts Council England advising delegates in how to successfully apply for funding for their projects).

To catch up with recordings, slides and photos of the day, go to <https://bit.ly/EasternArc2024>.

Heritage and Culture Network

The Conference was a key milestone in the development of the Eastern Arc Heritage and Culture Network (HCN), which has continued to grow since it was established in early 2024. Through a programme of regular webinars stakeholders within the region meet and discuss current projects and opportunities with academics in the Eastern Arc region. To find out more, go to www.easternarc.ac.uk/hcn/

Disability Access in Laboratory Environments (DALE)

February 2025

Around 1 in 5 working people in the UK have disabilities, but in the research and innovation sector this drops to 1 in 25, or 4% of the workforce.

As a result the needs of those with disability are not always taken into account. This is particularly so in laboratory environments, where people with disabilities have been regarded as a safety hazard.

Modern design and protocols can make labs fully accessible, safe, and comfortable for disabled people. However, poor attitudes and low knowledge about how to make labs accessible can hinder progress.

In February 2025 Eastern Arc won funding from the EDI Caucus (backed by UKRI and the British Academy) to address this. The project, 'Disability Access in Laboratory Environments, or DALE, was led by Dr Katherine Deane (UEA), with co-investigators Prof Joanna Semlyen, Brendan Burrill (UEA) and Em Diserens (Lightyear Foundation).

The project looked at labs across the Eastern Arc universities and assessed how they were for those with disabilities.

The project looked at a range of labs, including two highly-accessible facilities at UEA, and gained feedback on what aspects of disability access recommendations do or do not work in practice.

The work included a range of other partners, including The Royal Society, The Royal Society of Chemistry, The Institute of Biomedical Sciences, The Wellcome Trust, Catapult Cell and Gene Therapy, the National Association of Disabled Staff Networks (NADSN), and the EDI Sharing Hub funded by EPSRC.

'The result will be a much better understanding of the current situation, and the opportunity to improve access for those with disabilities to lab environments,' said project lead Katherine Deane. 'They will provide the basis and a framework for making our research infrastructure more accessible, open and welcoming to all, regardless of their disabilities, and thereby ensure that all can play an active part in pushing forward the boundaries of knowledge.'

To find out more about the project, click here: <https://bit.ly/EARC-DALE>

ACCESSIBLE
LABS
ARE FOR
EVERYONE

T-PIKE team established

November 2024

In November 2024 the £3m EPSRC-funded T-PIKE project established its operational team.

T-PIKE, or the Technical Platform for Innovation and Knowledge Exchange, is a ground-breaking project designed to train and empower technicians in working with industry.

The four-strong operational team is led by Phil Wilson, with a Knowledge Exchange Officer (KEO) in each of the original EARC members.

Together, they will support the T-PIKE leadership team, identifying and facilitating links with industry, whilst developing and supporting the training of technicians.



Phil Wilson
T-PIKE Project Manager
University of Essex

Phil was previously Operations Manager for a large secondary school, overseeing all infrastructure and support services. He also spent over ten years at UEA, in roles within the Faculty of Science. Phil has experience as a postdoctoral researcher, a technician, manager of UEA's Instrument Platforms and a laboratory manager for the Schools of Chemistry, Pharmacy and Environmental Sciences.



Bethany Dawson
Knowledge Exchange Officer
University of Kent

Bethany began her career as a secondary school English Teacher. Before joining Kent in 2025, she worked in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at University of the Arts London. Since 2019, Bethany has also been a part of the editorial team for *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics*.



Kirsty Herrington
Knowledge Exchange Officer
University of Essex

Kirsty recently supported the University's Careers team, administering student programmes and coordinating large-scale events, including the annual Careers Fair. Previously, she worked at the National Centre for Social Research, overseeing the bid process. She has also worked in the cruise industry, creating and writing tour programmes.



Liz Davis-Smith
Knowledge Exchange Officer
University of East Anglia

Since 2018, Liz has held Project Management and Business Development roles at UEA, mainly within the science faculty and more recently with Norwich Business School. She has a commercial background, having previously worked in account and regional management roles across the FMCG food and drink sector and the all-energy industries.

ARISE community of practice established

May 2025

Following its announcement in June 2024, the £3m ARISE Initiative held a two-day workshop at Essex in November, at which it established methodologies across disciplinary boundaries, and planned for the next six months.

This included the launch of a Coastal Resilience Community of Practice, which took place in May. The Community is a space for individuals, organisations, policy makers, managers, community members and activists to share insights, build collaborations, and learn about and from each other.

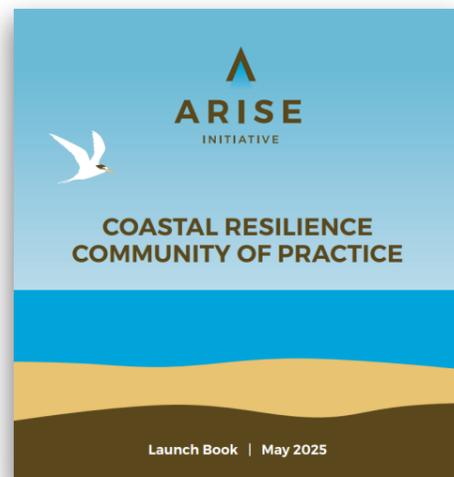
Through the Community of Practice, members make connections to others who share a belief that coastal lives, coastal living and our coastal environment in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Kent could be made more sustainable, resilient and prosperous.

It is driven by the belief that we are more powerful together than we are apart, and aims to find a common vision for the southern east coast that builds wide support and draws in the resources we need to make this vision achievable.

At the May meeting, the CoP identified six themes that the project will seek to address by testing interventions at twelve sites across Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Kent, exploring what works and why.

- **Social, political and demographic change** – concerns over intergenerational divisions, the impacts of local government reorganisation, new technologies like AI, and tensions between long-term residents, retirees and seasonal tourists.
- **Climate change impacts** – from accelerated coastal erosion to sediment movement and nature-based interventions. Ecology, wildlife and human connection to nature – recognising humans as part of ecosystems and the importance of early relationships with the natural world.
- **Creativity and civic agency** – communities taking charge of local challenges through creative practice – understood to mean both artistic expression and inventive problem-solving.
- **Food, farming and fisheries** – questions of sustainability and economic viability, land use and management.
- **Housing and health care** – national issues that nevertheless shape life on the coast – especially as devolution and local government reorganization unfold.

Following the CoP's initial meeting, ARISE published a 'launch book' based on the discussions. This is available at <https://bit.ly/ARISElaunchbook>



Opening up training opportunities across the Arc

Nov 2024-June 2025

The opening up of training opportunities across the consortium has long been an aspiration of Eastern Arc. This has been given added stimulus with the launch of our new five year strategy.

In 2024-25 we began to explore both the sharing of existing training, and also the creation of new opportunities across the Arc. We ran a small survey to understand what academics and professional services colleagues wanted. The results suggested that there was a strong desire for research development training. As a result we offered the sessions below.

In 2025-26 we hope to develop this further, auditing what currently exists, mapping them against the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF), identifying gaps, and creating a programme that will seek to address this.

European funding series

Hybrid and online

Nov 2024-February 2025

This short series of events brought together panels of academics from across the Arc who could speak about their experience of successfully securing EU funding. Sessions included:

- Everything you've ever wanted to know about Horizon Europe...
- Participating in Collaborative Projects in Horizon Europe
- Building International Networks for Research and Innovation
- Horizon Europe: Spotlight on Innovation

Understanding the wider political context for research funding

Hybrid and online

April 2025

This session offered an introduction to the political context behind recent funding announcements, to allow potential applicants to understand the politics behind a call, to better position themselves and respond successfully to it, as well as considering the 'direction of travel'.

Research Whisperer training

In-person

Nov 2024

Jonathan O'Donnell (Deakin University) co-created the Research Whisperer platform with colleague Tseen Khoo. Whilst visiting the UK he delivered a full-day training event to over 40 EARC colleagues. It included:

- Think like a kindergarten. This session gave participants a routemap and waymarkers to help them find the most appropriate funding bodies, and to develop a strategy for applying to them.
- Narrative of Ideas. This session explored how you participants can present their careers in a way that is clear, coherent and compelling, and supports their case for support.

Existing events

Online and in-person

Nov 2024-June 2025

Each university has increasingly opened its own events to those at other Arc universities. These included:

- Open research week (Essex)
- Summer of Research (Sussex)
- Refugee Week (UEA, Essex, Sussex)
- IADS ECR Symposium (Essex)
- Writing your first grant proposal (Kent)

Supporting career development

July 2025



As well as training and mentoring, Eastern Arc offers a space in which staff and students can develop the skills and networks necessary to build their careers. In the summer the consortium supported two groups of colleagues in hosting conferences: early-career researchers, and technical staff.

ECR Health and Wellbeing Conference

Co-hosted and led by the University of Essex School of Health and Social Care and the Institute of Public Health and Wellbeing, the first EARC ECR Health and Wellbeing Conference focussed on 'Reimagining Health and Wellbeing Across Societies and Systems.'

It brought together over 100 early career researchers and practitioners across the four Eastern Arc institutions to share their research and imagine the future. It was an opportunity for ECRs (including doctoral students) to showcase ideas through presentations, panels and posters, to network, discuss research, receive feedback, and develop new collaborations across the South East and East of England.



Technicians' Network Conference

Hosted at the University of Kent, the third annual TN Conference acted as a catalyst for bringing together 120 technical professionals from the EARC universities and other regional networks, including the Kent Technician Network, the London and South East Technician Commitment Initiative Network, and Norwich Research Park.

With sponsorship from RS, this year the conference was centred around the idea that collaboration inspires innovation through a diverse range of individuals coming together and creating. The event aimed to recognise, showcase, and celebrate the wide range of technical roles and work that enables successful and impactful education, research and innovation to take place. It provided a forum for discussion, networking, workshops and communication between technical staff and interested colleagues.

A significant element of the Conference was understanding the challenges faced by technicians, and identifying a set of recommendations arising from them.

Understanding the challenges faced by technicians

July 2025

A central element of the the 2025 Technicians Network Conference was a desire to understand the issues facing technical professionals, and to think about how these could be addressed.

The Technical Voice Engagement Session provided a dedicated platform for delegates to anonymously share their perspectives, experiences, and insights regarding the role and impact of technical staff within their respective institutions.

During this interactive session, participants were prompted with a series of targeted questions, which they could respond to privately and conveniently via an online form accessed on their mobile devices.

This approach aimed to facilitate honest and open feedback, capturing a wide range of views on current practices, challenges, and opportunities for enhancing communication, recognition, and professional development across the technical community.

The collected responses offer valuable insights into the collective voice of technical staff, highlighting common themes, priorities, and areas where strategic support or initiatives could be most impactful.

Recommendations

Following the feedback from Eastern Arc technical professionals, as well as those of the other networks taking part in the Conference 2025, we have identified 10 recommendations, and will be working with our universities to address them. They are:

1. Enhance recognition programmes
2. Create structured career development frameworks
3. Promote inclusivity
4. Improve communication channels
5. Invest in training and development
6. Foster networking opportunities
7. Encourage personal development
8. Facilitate knowledge sharing
9. Monitor and evaluate progress
10. Engage leadership support

To read the recommendations in full, click on the QR code below.



Developing a national framework for MCRs

April 2025

Following Eastern Arc's 2024 report on the challenges faced by mid-career researchers (MCRs), and the subsequent convening of a roundtable meeting with national funders and other stakeholders, we have been working with Vitae to explore the possibility of developing a national framework to support their career development.

Vitae is a natural partner for this: it is an on-profit programme run by the charity the Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) to provide research, intelligence and innovation services to those who support career development. It is responsible for the Researcher Development Framework (RDF), against which our training programme is being mapped.

A draft proposal has been prepared, which is being reviewed and further developed with other partners, including universities in the N8 Consortium, with the intention of publishing it in 2026.

Mentoring scheme continues to grow

August 2025

The fifth annual round of the EARC mentoring scheme received over 80 applications. With these, the total number of academics, researchers, technicians and professional services colleagues who have taken part in the scheme is over 450. In 2025-26 we intend to move the deadline of the scheme to April to allow mentors and mentees more time to take part in the scheme, once partnerships have been forged.

Influencing the development of the Industrial Strategy

December 2024

In the autumn the new Government published a green paper on a proposed industrial strategy.

Eastern Arc submitted a joint response to the Government's proposals, and this subsequently influenced the final white paper.

We considered the green paper a 'meaningful and considered proposal, and supported the Government's commitment to developing a strong, business-focused Industrial Strategy. It had clearly benefited from significant input from industry, the result of which was a clear, logical and sensible proposal for a long-term roadmap for economic development.

Nevertheless, we raised a number of points, including:

- The need to include universities explicitly in the development of the final Strategy. To maximise their contribution, we suggested that the Strategy should set out a robust and sustainable framework for universities to address the longstanding problems of the current financial model. Without such a framework, the capacity and capability for universities to contribute to the Strategy will be limited.
- The unresolved tension between national growth and regional development. The Strategy seeks both to drive national growth and to support regional development. However, the two are not identical, and there can be a tension between the two, which the Strategy does not resolve.
- The importance of a more granular understanding of regional need and opportunity. The greater southeast (GSE) is the productivity powerhouse of the UK, but the centres of productivity within it are focussed in discrete geographic locations and institutions. Elsewhere within the region there is both huge potential and significant need and inequality, as with other parts of the country, and it is important that this be fully recognised.
- The potential danger of over-relying on mayoral combined authorities that, at the time of publication, did not represent the whole of the UK, and none of the Eastern Arc region.
- The importance of not disregarding the work of previous strategies wholesale;
- The need for international openness to foster growth. A significant reason for the UK's attractiveness to international investment in the past was its open economy, its favourable position in welcoming international talent.
- The necessity of not losing sight of the wider drivers of growth and its own skills agenda, as highlighted by the original (2018-21) Industrial Strategy Council, and the need to support all five capitals, including social and human. A healthy and equitable workforce, together with thriving communities, is noted in the Strategy (p29) but should be explicitly supported, with the necessary research and interventions to enable this to happen.



UKRI Place Investment Strategy

October 2024

In October we submitted a response to UKRI's survey on its investment strategy, and the EARC Director was subsequently invited to take part in a roundtable to discuss the development of the strategy further.

We emphasised the need to recognise and embed:

- The value of all research intensive universities, the important part they play as regional catalysts, and the value of regional collaboration.
- A more granular understanding the strengths and opportunities of different regions (see also our response to the Industrial Strategy green paper, left), particularly in the greater southeast beyond the London 'halo', the M4 corridor and the Golden Triangle.
- A joined-up approach with Government drivers for growth, and local policy initiatives such as enterprise zones, to ensure that conflicts and mixed messages are minimised.



CaSE Discovery Decade

October 2024

In 2024 the Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE) worked with the research agency Public First to carry out a major study of public attitudes to research and development (R&D). This comprised four nationally-representative surveys, polling a total of 18,000 people and anchored by a landmark survey of 8,000 people in July 2022, and 14 focus groups with people from across the UK.

Eastern Arc was invited to a workshop exploring the results, and the consortium subsequently invited the project leads to present their findings to the Eastern Arc Advocacy Group, which was invited to work with it to embed the key messages as to the value of R&D to the economy, and to encourage public support for it during difficult financial times.



With radical hearts and open minds

Eastern Arc is the regional research consortium that brings together the Universities of East Anglia, Essex, Kent and Sussex.

All four universities were established in the 1960s to be a different type of institution, aiming to work across disciplinary boundaries, and to offer alternative ways of thinking.

In addition, they engage with and embody their regions, acting to develop societal and economic benefit for them.

As a result they are both grounded in their communities but also outward looking and believe in the value of 'doing different'. Eastern Arc was established to support and develop this, to encourage and support collaboration, and to work together for the benefit of our universities, the people who work within them, and the regions of which we're part.

www.easternarc.ac.uk

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University of Essex

